

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 18th September, 2020

## MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Black (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford;  
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Carson, Garrett,  
Groogan, Heading, Long, Lyons, McAllister,  
McDonough-Brown, McLaughlin, McReynolds,  
Murphy, Spratt and Walsh.

Also attended: Councillors M. Kelly, O'Hara and Pankhurst.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;  
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;  
Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director Place and Economy;  
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational  
Strategy;  
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;  
Mrs. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes; and  
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 21st August, omitting those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee, 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 September.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were recorded.

### **Restricted Items**

**The information contained in the reports associated with the following 5 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 of these 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.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan and Efficiency Programme**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the assessment of the key financial factors which influenced the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021/22 - 2023/24 and the rate setting process for 2021/22, together with an overview of the priorities and work in progress to establish the 2021/22 – 2023/24 Efficiency Programme.

The report highlighted the main business as usual cost pressures, that is, externally imposed increases to the Council's pay bill, the future revenue running costs resulting from capital investment, external economic factors and external income. It provided details also on committed priorities, such as, the waste plan, the City Deal, physical programmes, the cultural strategy and CPI uplifts, growth priorities and the rate base. The Director of Finance and Resources concluded by outlining the next steps in the rate setting process.

In response to a proposal by a Member to include an amount of finance on the rate base year on year to fund the next phase of the alleygating scheme, the Director explained that this would have to be considered as part of the overall rate-setting process and included as an emerging project within the capital programme.

After further discussion, the Committee noted the challenges to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium term rate setting and that a further report on progress will be brought to Committee in October; and agreed:

- that an Alleygating 'Phase 5' scheme (of approx. £500k in value) be considered as an emerging project in the capital programme and as a priority potential growth proposal for the capital financing framework to be agreed during the rate setting process; and
- contact be made with the Housing Executive and the Department of Justice to discuss other options/possible funding for alleygating schemes.

### **Finance Update**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st August, an update was provided on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's financial position and a strategy to address the forecast deficit and the mitigation measures which had and would be taken as the situation evolved. Accordingly, the Director of Finance and Resources submitted a further report which presented the impact of recovery decisions on the latest forecasted deficit.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

**Destination Hub - concept update report**

The Committee was reminded that the Belfast Destination Hub (BDH) was Belfast's key project under the tourism and regeneration pillar of the Belfast City Region Deal (BRCD).

The City Deal would seek to deliver a series of internationally visible transformative tourism products to encourage visitors to choose Northern Ireland, stay longer, spend more and support the delivery of permanent jobs across the region. It would also be a huge local cultural and educational asset.

Within the BRCD, the Destination Hub mirrored the ambition of the Belfast Agenda and Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) to deliver a second world-class visitor attraction to generate additional tourist spend and footfall in the city centre. The BDH ambition was to establish Belfast as a leading cultural tourism destination. The timeframe for completion was 2026.

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting in June 2019, in line with Treasury recommendations, and in recognition of a project of this scale, scope and complexity, agreement was given to move forward with a new phase of development that comprised of a number of work strands. This included the establishment of a robust governance structure; the production of a Treasury compliant Business Case; further work on site identification; further concept development and a strategic communications framework. To deliver a project of this magnitude for the city and the region, resources were allocated to deliver these work streams.

The Committee then proceeded to receive a detailed presentation on the Outline Business Case, the site acquisition, the spatial assessment and the concept development from Wendy Langham, Programme Director, and Eimear Henry, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism.

The Committee:

1. noted the progress made in relation to the Destination Hub concept; and
2. agreed that the site identified be the preferred site and authorised officers to examine options for its acquisition, with a report to be submitted to a future meeting.

**Operational Recovery**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the recovery of Council services, a snapshot of the current status of frontline services and indicative re-opening times for those services that remain suspended.

The Committee noted the updated position in relation to recovery of services.

**Waste Update – Bryson Recycling and Inner City Box Collections – Including presentation from Bryson Recycling**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st August, it had agreed:

1. to rescind its decision of 19th June to award a Single Tender Action (STA) for six months to Bryson Recycling for the Kerbside Recycling Contract and agreed, instead, to award the STA for a period of 12 months; (with the possibility of extension);
2. to the commissioning of an options appraisal on the arrangements for future waste collections as soon as possible, to be completed and submitted to the Committee for consideration within 2 months;
3. that a monthly update be submitted to the Committee on progress;  
and
4. that Bryson Recycling be asked to attend a future meeting of the Committee with a view to improving performance.

In addition the Committee had requested that a Waste Workshop be held.

Accordingly, the Committee considered a update report which indicated that the contract had been extended until 31st July, 2021, that, in relation to the commissioning of the options appraisal, officers had been granted approval, due to the very short timescales, to engage support and the independent services of APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) Performance Networks, with work on this currently ongoing; and that the workshop had been provisionally scheduled for 12 noon on 7th October.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to receive a presentation from Ms. Aileen Monahan, Assistant Director Business Development, Bryson Recycling.

Ms. Monahan provided an overview of the organisation's turnover and indicated that it operated at ten sites with 280 employees. She stated that Bryson Recycling had been working in partnership with the Council since 2001 and highlighted the work which had been undertaken, such as the initial trial to 8,000 households through to the establishment of a Collaborative Circular Economy in 2016. She then reviewed the current activities which included kerbside collections from 58,000 households and the employment of 30 frontline collection staff, plus support staff.

She stated that Bryson Recycling was owned by the Bryson Charitable Group and was Northern Ireland's leading social enterprise and Leading provider of: care services for vulnerable people; employment and training initiatives for long term unemployed; energy advice, tackling fuel poverty; and sporting activities to promote healthy living recycling services.

She then outlined the organisation's vision, its role in the local circular economy and the challenges which had been presented by the COVID-10 pandemic and the solutions and actions undertaken in response. She concluded by stating that Bryson Recycling would continue to work in partnership with the Council through social sourcing to find solutions to handling waste in a ways that are not just about maximising profit but about maximising the positive impact on the environment, the local economy and society.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Ms. Monahan for attending and she left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

**Matters referred back from Council/Motions**

**Motion – National Armed Forces Day 2022**

The Committee was advised that, at the Council meeting on 1st September, the following motion had been proposed by Councillor Pankhurst and seconded by Councillor Hutchinson:

“This Council agrees to bid for the National Armed Forces Day to be held in Belfast in June 2022.”

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred without debate to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

Moved by Alderman Kingston,  
Seconded by Alderman Dorrian,

That the Committee agrees approve the motion to bid to host Armed Forces Day 2022 and a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed be brought back to the Committee.

On a recorded vote, ten Members voted for the proposal and ten against:

<b><u>For 10</u></b>	<b><u>Against 10</u></b>
Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and Councillors Bunting, Long, McAllister, McDonough-Brown, McReynolds and Spratt.	Councillors Black (Chairperson), Beattie, Carson, Garrett, Groogan, Heading, Lyons, McLaughlin, Murphy and Walsh.

**Casting Vote**

There being an equality of votes, the Chairperson, Councillor Black, exercised her second and casting vote against the proposal and it was declared lost.

**Motion – Procurement Policy – Living Wage**

The Committee was advised that the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Murphy and seconded by Councillor Beattie at the Council meeting on 1st September, had, in accordance with Standing Orders, been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“That this council consider promoting a procurement policy that supports the principles of a real living wage and respects the rights of workers including the right to form and participate in trade unions.”

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

### **Motion – Summer Youth Employment Programme**

The Committee was advised that the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor Beattie, at the Council meeting on 1st September, had, in accordance with Standing Orders, been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This council agrees to work in partnership with other public sector bodies, the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and the private sector to develop a Summer Youth Employment Programme.

This programme should be aimed at 14-21 year olds primarily from areas of multiple deprivation from across the 4 quarters of the city. The programme will last 6 weeks.

This paid internship will aim to give the young kids of this city a decent wage, improve their skills and qualities, develop experience and hopefully lead to employment opportunities for kids from lower socio economic backgrounds in sectors that they know, enjoy and excel in.

In developing this programme, Belfast City Council should look to Boston Mayor Marty Walsh’s programme as a model of good practice in this field, which even during the COVID crisis offered 8,000 posts to young people across the city of Boston.”

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

### **Motion – Closure of Botanic Needle Exchange**

The Committee was advised that, at the Council meeting on 1st September, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Smyth and seconded by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCusker, had been referred to the Committee for consideration in accordance with Standing Order 13(f):

“This council notes the closing of the needle exchange facility on Botanic Avenue following on from the closure of the Boots facility in City Centre earlier this year. This council will invite the Public Health Agency to its next meeting of the People and Communities Committee to address these worrying closures of much needed facilities and what longer term strategy it has in place to:

1. address drug use and misuse in the City Centre,
2. drive forward a civic conversation of drug classifications, legislation and decriminalisation,

3. develop harm reduction models that save lives
4. and proactively addresses the concerns of local residents.”

The Committee agreed that the Public Health Authority be invited to present to a future meeting of the People and Communities Committee to address the issues raised in the motion.

**Motion - Addressing Hate and Intolerance  
across all our Communities**

The Committee was advised that the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor O’Hara and seconded by Councillor Groogan had been referred to the Committee for consideration by the Council at its meeting on 1st September:

“The Belfast Agenda has an ambition to be a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive City for all. While we have made significant progress there are opportunities for enhancing this work. This council recognises the work that has been undertaken particularly by many in the community and voluntary sector to improve relations and realise the Belfast Agenda. However, gaps remain, including through the allocation of funding.

This Council recognises the scourge of Hate Crime and Incidents in the City. In 2019/2020 there were 694 Hate Crimes and 758 Hate Incidents reported to Police in the Belfast District Area on the basis of sexual orientation, race and religion. We appreciate that there is a significant underreporting of hate crimes and incidents. There were 98 hate crimes and incidents on the basis of transgender status and 171 crimes and incidents on the basis of disability status across all of Northern Ireland.

This Council recognises that it has a statutory duty to address Good Relations but also recognises that this is on the limited basis of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. This only covers some of the hate crime categories yet we understand that to tackle hate and intolerance we must promote good relations between those groups who experience hate but are not covered by the Good Relations duty.

This Council therefore commits to:

- Supporting the extension of the Good Relations duty to the hate crime categories
- Write to the Executive Office requesting flexibility in its Good Relations funding and request that the Executive Office consider extension of its Good Relations duties to the hate crime categories
- Council officers scope internal mechanisms re good relations and equality and diversity funding to fund more proactive work in addressing hate crime and fulfilling the ambition of the Belfast Agenda.”

The Committee agreed that a report on the issues raised in the motion be considered, in the first instance, by the Shared City Partnership.

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

#### **Belfast: Our Recovery**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

##### **“1.0 Purpose of Report”**

**1.1 To provide Members with an update on the significant work to be taken forward by the Council and working across government and with city partners to support the city and its communities to respond and recover from the Covid-10 pandemic. The strong commitment by Council to support communities, businesses and vulnerable people during these challenging times is set out in the attached draft document: ‘Belfast: Our Recovery’.**

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- (i) Note that the Committee will receive a presentation on the key elements of the Belfast: Our Recovery’ plan for the city as set out within this report;**
- (ii) Consider and endorse the Belfast: Our Recovery’ and note the priority areas of focus and the associated support, interventions and programmes committed to within the framework.**
- (iii) Agree that Party Group Leaders’ and the Chief Executive signatories be included in the Foreword to demonstrate the strong cross-party commitment and support to the city recovery.**
- (iv) Agree that the Belfast: Our Recovery’ be published as a live and evolving framework – implementation plans will be adapted as circumstances change and as informed by continued engagement with communities and city stakeholders and partners.**
- (v) Note the intention to proactively engage with communities, central government, key decision makers and private sector to intensify the focus on our priorities for recovery and to secure the necessary support and resources to underpin our work.**

##### **3.0 Main report**

**3.1 In the midst of the ongoing pandemic, authorities are rightly focused on minimising the human cost, providing relief to their communities and delivering essential day-to-day**

services. Another major challenge for the Council and city partners is to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their local economies, so that businesses can once again thrive and provide employment opportunities, minimise potential job losses and retain the vibrancy of local communities and the city centre.

- 3.2** Members will be aware that we are still in the midst of a significant pandemic emergency with new localised restrictions recently introduced within the city to reduce the spread of the infection rates and to manage the significant risks which exist.
- 3.3** There is clearly a significant civic leadership and convening role for the Council to bring together key partners and work with communities to respond to the current emergency situation, ensuring the necessary measures are taken to keep citizens safe, whilst retaining critical services.
- 3.4** It is evident that there will be lasting structural changes to the city's economy, its infrastructure, its environment and to its communities, and this will likely result in financial and economic uncertainty for some time. There is a significant risk that existing inequalities, including emotional health and wellbeing, social isolation, addictions and poverty will be further amplified during this period.
- 3.5** The Belfast: Our Recovery document seeks to mitigate the immediate and short-term impacts of the pandemic, including, for example job losses, the need for skilling and reskilling to access employment opportunities, risks around vulnerable people and social isolation, and providing targeted support. Emphasis is given to how we maximise the social value of our own capital investments and grant programmes to support recovery, as well as the opportunities presented by our procurement, to promote inclusive growth, support local businesses and supply chains, and create local jobs. The document also highlights the need for a people and jobs led approach to recovery.
- 3.6** We are committed to work alongside communities and city partners to bring forward a series of medium and longer-term interventions to build the foundations for sustained recovery. These will need to maximise opportunities to sustain and create jobs, provide skills and employment support including traditional skills, drive investment in communities creating local assets and facilities, support local businesses and create community wealth, and support key sectors particularly those impacted by the pandemic. Examples of some of the levers which we will seek to accelerate as part of recovery include the Belfast Region City Deal investment, digital innovation, focus on green stimulus, use of public land assets to bring forward mixed-use developments.

- 3.7 It is also important to recognise that the Recovery document does not seek to replace existing commitments and ambitions set out within longer-term strategies such as the Belfast Agenda and its review, the Corporate Plan and the Resilience Strategy, Instead, it will help shape and sharpen our focus going forward through a ‘recovery lens’.
- 3.8 Whilst the intention is to publish the Belfast: Our Recovery following consideration by SP&R Committee and endorsement by Full Council in early October 2020, it is recognised that the document represents a ‘moment in time’ picture of our current understanding of the emerging impacts and opportunities for driving recovery. It is likely that as the pandemic continues, circumstances may change and our plans and priorities will need to be updated to reflect new evidence and data as it becomes available, and to be informed by continual engagement and input from communities across Belfast in identifying and co-designing interventions going forward.
- 3.9 The framework covers five core strands which are not being considered in isolation but in terms of they can be brought together to build the foundations for recovery and deliver sustainable inclusive growth.
- (1) Our city – safe, vibrant, connected spaces and places
  - (2) Our services – adoptive and responsive to local needs
  - (3) Our communities - strengthened and resilient
  - (4) Our economy – resilience and inclusive
  - (5) Our environment – sustainable and climate resilient
  - (6) Our digital innovation – transformative and leading edge
- 3.10 In order to help drive recovery, we must continue to build on what has already been achieved in the city and maintain our competitiveness and attractiveness in terms of investment and further develop the opportunities which we have collaboratively worked to create. It is proposed that we work with our city partners to develop a strong public private Renewed Ambition programme around the city’s offering as a place to invest in line with our Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- 3.11 It is intended, as part of this Renewed Ambition programme, to bring forward a joint public private programme of activity, including advocacy and lobbying, to highlight the city's offer in terms of the built environment, whilst ensuring that the city evolves to meet the requirements of the local communities and those who live, work and visit here.

**Community Recovery**

- 3.12 While there clearly remains an immediate need to continue to provide emergency support and ensuring key services and assets remain operational, looking ahead it will be important that we work collaboratively and harness the energy of our communities and city partners, ensuring greater co-ordination and innovation in addressing the specific issues that communities face across the city. As we move forward, there is a need to build community confidence, capacity and resilience across neighbourhoods through a range of programmes of support.
- 3.13 The benefit and potential impact of this approach is clearly demonstrated through the community response hub established by the Council to support residents during the coronavirus pandemic. Working with DFC and a range of community, voluntary and statutory partners the hub provide assistance to Belfast residents, including the coordination and distribution of 110,000 food parcels to vulnerable people across the city as well as specific emotional, financial and other support services. Communities were first to respond to the pandemic and have shown the strength and resilience of the sector in challenging times. In support of this work, the Council allocated over £1.6m funding to over 280 local community and voluntary organisations to support vulnerable people and families and assist community recovery.
- 3.14 The Council has also continued to deliver the £6m council grants programmes, despite the financial difficulties we face, to ensure important support services and programmes are delivered across the city. We will work with central government and other funding bodies to bring forward further financial support packages for communities and the third sector to help address many of the social challenges which will be amplified as a direct result of the impact of the pandemic. As previously discussed with Members we will also review our own internal resources and services, starting with a transformational review of community provision within the city.

**Engaging with communities to support recovery**

- 3.15 Engagement plans are being developed to ensure participation of communities and stakeholders in the further development and ongoing implementation of our recovery plans, this will include (but is not limited to): the identification of II area priorities for community recovery, shaping of key strategic work programmes (e.g. Climate change), and engaging at an area level to inform the upcoming review of the Belfast Agenda.

**3.16** In the current climate, Members will recognise the challenges that exist in engaging with the public due to the restrictions on public gatherings and face to face meetings. Our engagement plans will need to utilise new and innovative engagement methods, using technology to maximise participation. As a first step, Members should note that a new online Engagement platform has now been procured and is in the early stages of deployment. This new platform will form a key element of our engagement approach over the coming months and, in tandem with other engagement tools such as webinars and social media, will be an opportunity for promoting citizen participation in city recovery, shaping Council services, policies and plans, and in the wider community planning process.

**3.17** Financing Recovery

Members will be aware that officers are continuing to work with and lobby NI Executive Departments to identify and draw down any external funding to support our recovery plans. This includes the recent £3m+ Revitalisation Capital Fund secured with funding from Department for Communities and Department of Infrastructure. We will continue to work with central government and other partners to maximise the Belfast allocation of any emerging funding programmes (e.g. DFI funding for blue and green infrastructure, DfE £17.2m investment to support apprenticeships etc, PEACE PLUS etc).

**3.18** Financial and Resource Implications

There are no resource requirements as a consequence of this paper

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

**The Belfast: Our Recovery seeks to reduce inequalities by proposing a series of measures to support recovery.”**

During consideration of the report, the Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st August, 2020, it had approved the process for allocation of business grants as part of the Department for Communities’ Revitalisation fund. This had included an allocation of £400,000 towards grants to help local companies to adapt their premises to take account of the operating implications of COVID-19. At that time, it was noted that officers would monitor the progress of the grant allocation and report back to the Committee, with the potential to allocate additional funding, should the demand exist and should the Committee agree that this was an appropriate response.

The scheme instantly attracted significant interest from businesses having attracted over 569 applications and, because of this, it was recommended that the Committee agrees to increase the allocation of funding to the business grants, from £400,000 to £800,000, within the tranche 1 allocation to be met from an unallocated

amount of £200k from the fund and the re-profiling of £200k of Physical Interventions into Tranche 2.

The Committee:

- (i) noted the presentation on the key elements of the Belfast: Our Recovery' plan for the city as set out within the report;
- (ii) endorsed the Belfast: Our Recovery' and noted the priority areas of focus and the associated support, interventions and programmes committed to within the framework;
- (iii) agreed that Party Group Leaders' and the Chief Executive signatories be included in the Foreword to demonstrate the strong cross-party commitment and support to the city recovery;
- (iv) agreed that the Belfast: Our Recovery' be published as a live and evolving framework – with implementation plans to be adapted as circumstances change and as informed by continued engagement with communities and city stakeholders and partners;
- (iv) Noted the intention to proactively engage with communities, central government, key decision makers and the private sector to intensify the focus on our priorities for recovery and to secure the necessary support and resources to underpin our work; and
- (v) agreed to increase the allocation of funding to the business grants, from £400,000 to £800,000, within the tranche 1 allocation to be met from an unallocated amount of £200k from the fund and the re-profiling of £200k of Physical Interventions into Tranche 2.

### **Customer Focus Programme Update**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

**1.1 Members are reminded that in May 2020 the Committee was provided with an update on the Customer Focus Programme which included an overview of work being undertaken to support the Covid 19 Recovery programme. Members were also advised that, due to programme resources being redirected, a review of the programme plan was required and would be reported to a future committee.**

**1.2 This report provides an update on further activity in support of Recovery and provides an update on the programme plan and the channel shift strategy which is a key tenet of the Customer Focus programme.**

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- 1. Note the update on support provided to the Recovery Programme.**
- 2. Note the Chanel Shift Strategy summarised.**

3. Note the update on the programme plan and the overview attached at Appendix 2.
4. Note the planned work on services for Elected Members which have been progressed to outline design stage as part of the future blueprint attached at Appendix 3.
5. Note update on the Council's new website and telephony upgrade.
6. Note that staff and Trade Unions have been engaged and will continue to be consulted as we move to implementation.

### 3.0 Main report

#### 3.1 Update on support for the Recovery Programme

Members will be aware that, during the Covid-19 emergency, the Customer Focus Programme diverted resources to support the Community Response Hub and established a customer contact centre in response to requirements for food distribution and referrals for welfare support. The contact centre also supported the recovery of Birth Registrations and switchboard operations.

The Community Response Hub and contact centre have now been stood down and the booking line for Birth Registration and operation of switchboard have reverted to Legal and Civic Services. There have been many lessons learned from the response to Covid 19 which has enabled us to test our customer focus principles and has evidenced the strong commitment and resilience of all staff involved.

As part of recovery of Council services, including the Council's main switchboard service, we are routinely monitoring customer contact and adapting our communication with customers as required to manage our contact channels effectively. Analysis of telephone call volumes confirms that the Council continues to experience high volumes of calls. In order to manage telephony effectively and to ensure our customers have a positive experience, the highest volume of calls (Waste Collections) has been directed away from switchboard. This means the welcome message that customers hear when they contact the Council has been changed to promote the use of our website to encourage customers to use our online services and to direct calls to the appropriate service.

Staff from the Customer Focus Programme together with Continuous Improvement, Legal and Civic Services, Digital Services, Marketing and Corporate Communications and departments are continuing to support the Council's Recovery Programme and how customer channels are being managed.

### 3.2 Delivery of the new future blueprint for Customer

Since the meeting in May 2020 the programme plan has been reviewed in light of resources required to respond to the Covid 19 emergency and the subsequent Recovery Programme. The diagram attached at Appendix 1 sets out the draft future blueprint for the Customer hub which was presented at the May 2020 committee.

Our vision of customer focussed services will ensure that we deliver:

- Optimised customer contact – professionalising resources and providing modern digital and telephony systems with access to real time data on contact performance
- Channel shift – moving where possible to digitally enabled self-serve solutions
- Customer centricity – designing our services around the needs of our customers.

The Customer Hub blueprint remains as is, putting our customers at the heart of everything, ensuring we provide a consistent and professional service, affording our customers choice and convenience. This means improving and aligning all our access to service channels – telephone, face to face, website, and social media. To support this we have developed a Channel Shift Strategy.

### 3.3 Channel Shift Strategy

We have worked with our Strategic Delivery Partner, PA Consulting Limited, to develop a Channel Shift Strategy.

#### What do we mean by Channel shift?

By ‘Channel Shift’ we mean supporting customers to use the channels that best meet their individual needs and preferences, while providing best value for the Council. This includes the various methods or systems for communication, access, provision and distribution of services that Council has at its disposal e.g. face-to-face, telephone, online, webchat, email, text, letter. These interactions will be with a wide variety of stakeholders and are designed around deep insights into what way various segments of the Council’s overall service user community wish to be engaged, what best suits their lifestyles and abilities. These needs and preferences will likely vary across different types of services.

The focus of the channel strategy is on delivering the best outcomes (financial and non-financial) from using our

available resources effectively e.g. more expensive channels such as telephone and face-to-face are directed to those with greatest need / where they will have greatest impact.

### What will Channel Shift Deliver?

Belfast City Council wants to meet customer expectations, to deliver a better customer experience whilst reducing costs and so are harnessing digital as the channel of choice for delivery of services and information. It is important to note the strategy is 'Digital First not Digital Only' which meets the needs of the majority, enabling provision of sensitive services via more costly channels for those who need it most.

The internet has made customers much more digitally aware and has led to a major shift in how products and services we all consume are both designed and delivered. Customers expect information to be personalised and readily available at the touch of a button. We can see in recent months how digital channels have become even more important during the Covid 19 emergency in enabling different ways of working and supporting local communities.

This Digital First principle reinforces the Council's ambitions to deliver services digitally as far as possible. However, Digital First does not mean that all services to all customers will be delivered through digital channels. Face to face services will be required and for some customers this may continue to be their preferred channel.

Digital First is not just about a new website or new technology. It is about leveraging digital solutions for each service, end to end, to:

- Reduce call volumes
- Eliminate Service failure
- Improve the customer experience
- Enable real time reporting for operatives
- Improve access to real time data.

This has the potential to fundamentally shift the relationship between services and users, as well as how staff work. As such the implementation of 'Digital first' (end to end) and the creation of the Customer Hub is as much a cultural change as it is a change of delivery model. When re-designing each service it is important to implement the channel(s) that are most effective for the service being provided.

#### 3.4 Channel Shift Focuses on Good Service Design

Developing effective channel shift therefore is not about a one size fits all strategy for the entire council. It is not about:

- launching all of our services on all new channels without much thought to the relevance and cost of doing so
- focusing on switching customer contact to the cheapest channel (often assumed to be the internet) without much thought as to the relevance of this channel to the service or customer base.

A more sophisticated approach is required to realise channel shift; to ensure that the most effective channels are leveraged for each service, and for each customer. This approach will be delivered through the application of the design principles (in particular Digital First, Customer Focus) and good Service Design.

The Service Design approach already adopted by Council will be applied to each service as it is on-boarded into the Customer Hub and will ensure that for each service we understand who the Customers are for that service. A Customer persona is created for each customer type; detailing the needs, behaviours, pain points and preferred contact points for that customer type. By understanding:

- Who BCC customers are
- What their needs and capabilities are, and
- How they prefer to contact the council,

The Council will be able to develop a Channel Shift campaign consisting of interventions/activities that are *tailored* to those customer types to ensure a successful change to adherence of the Digital First principle.

#### 3.5 Revised Implementation Plan and how we will do this

Given the complexity of the customer programme it will not be possible to implement all of its elements at one time. Attached at Appendix 2 is a high level plan setting out the key milestones for the implementation of the Customer Hub in April 2021. Staff and customers have been involved in the programme to date and this will continue throughout the implementation.

By April 2021 we will have the following in place:

### **3.6 Customer Hub**

This new function will deal with customer contact for all departments and services, across all channels (online, mobile, telephone, face-to-face, email, and social media).

Initially the hub will manage all customer contact for cleansing/waste and calls currently through the main switchboard and corporate complaints numbers. There is further work planned to co-design processes including the handoff from customer hub to services in other departments. The implementation initially will be on a 'wide and thin' basis i.e. a basic level of information and signposting for customers will be provided at the first point of contact for all services across all channels.

This will provide a platform for on-boarding of services in the next phase after April 2021, deepening the information and value at first point of contact as services are designed end to end - thus improving customer experience.

The structure/establishment of the Customer Hub and detailed design of posts is currently in progress. It is envisaged that staff will be in post by January 2021 to allow for staff development and the building of capacity and support systems and processes for hub operation.

Integral to this formative stage is the inclusion of staff and Trade Unions in understanding the impact of these changes on current posts and post holders and the transition to the new Customer Hub. A separate report on the establishment of the Customer Hub, people, posts and finance will be presented at a future committee.

Discussions on the physical location of the customer hub remain at an early stage and work to examine the feasibility of options has not progressed due to the pandemic and will be reviewed in light of the Recovery Programme and the planning of access to buildings.

### **3.7 Elected Members' future blueprint**

A Task and Finish Working Group has been established with elected members who have participated in three workshops to date to identify and design solutions to support elected members in their constituency work.

We plan to have a dedicated contact channel for elected members within the Customer Hub. Additionally we will provide members with real time information on service delivery so they can be informed of issues earlier, enabling

them to be responsive to constituents' queries. Members will also have the ability to track issues they have raised and will have visibility of issues emerging in their areas. A future blueprint for services for elected members can be found at Appendix 3.

Work will continue with members in the coming months to design services to meet their needs which may include prototyping and trialling of solutions.

### 3.8 Missed Bins

Aligned to the overall Resources and Fleet transition and improvement programme, we are seeking to address the issue of missed bin collections. We have focussed specific resource on how we can address these issues including information flows between elected members, customers, staff and managers. For example a prototype of an app to report missed bins has been developed and plans for implementation are in progress. This will help provide better business intelligence and improved understanding of the cause of service failures and identifying interventions to improve service.

### 3.9 Enabling Infrastructure

The success of the Customer Focus programme is wholly dependent on the delivery of enabling infrastructure – web and social media channels provided by Corporate Communications and the technical infrastructure, telephony and systems delivered by Digital Services. The following is an update on these key elements of the programme:

### 3.10 New Council Website Launched

The Council's new website launched on Tuesday 28 July 2020 in line with the programme plan. There are a number of new design features on the website which are being assessed using web analytics. An overview of performance over the same period from 2019 is as follows:

- Page views have increased by almost 44%. These page views include views of our online forms. We also need to consider an increase in people searching for info during COVID-19.
- Users are viewing more than one page on our website during their visit and are not 'exiting' out of pages early in their journey. Visitors are finding content relevant - both bounce rates and % exits have dropped.
- Users are finding information quicker than they previously would have - average time on page has dropped. We have a cookie statement in place where users are required to opt in to analytics. Our supplier

had made us aware that we could see a decline to visitor numbers due to this.

Work is continuing through Marketing and Corporate Communications in partnership with departments to enhance our web content. As we work through, this will iterate and will be ongoing.

### **3.11 Telephony Infrastructure Upgraded**

As evidenced through lockdown and now into recovery our telephone solution is one of the Council's most mission-critical systems. Digital Services has just completed the upgrade of our telephony solution which simplifies administration, and enhances security and business continuity. The system upgrade also introduces enhanced features and services which will be required to support modern digital workplace requirements and the integrated telephony features needed for the Customer Focus Programme. These include:

- **Contact Centre**
  - **Voice, Chat, SMS, Email, FAX, and AI Chatbots**
  - **Built-in Call and Screen Recording**
  - **Built-in Workforce Scheduling**
- **Customised CRM integration**
  - **Automatically access customer information**
  - **Pre-populate CRM with customer information**
  - **Click to dial – call, text or email customers within CRM**
- **Softphones**
  - **make and receive calls on your laptop, mobile phone or desk phone**
  - **voicemail integrated with email**

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

SP&R agreed in November 2017 that a budget of £500k be set aside for the customer focus project.

Staff and Trade Unions have been engaged throughout the programme. As we move to Delivery, with Trade Union agreement we have established a sub group of JNCC to facilitate further engagement and consultation on staff implications of the programme in line with agreed HR policies and procedures.

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

**Work on the EQIA for the Customer Focus Programme has been completed and the outcome published on our community engagement platform, Citizenspace.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**City Region Growth Deal – update**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

**1.1 This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD).**

**2.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked:

- Note the programme overview, the update in respect of each of the pillars and the progress that has been made in Outline Business Case (OBC) development.
- Note the key strategic challenges ahead and the importance the BRCD Programme will play in the region’s recovery from the Covid-19 emergency.
- Note the update in respect of the BRCD Council Panel.

**3.0 Main report**

**Programme Overview**

**3.1 The SP&R Committee in June were provided with an update on the early stages of the BRCD team getting the programme moving again following delays due to the pandemic. Since then, meetings of the Executive Board, Advisory Boards, Finance and Communications Forums have now all resumed via Microsoft Teams.**

**3.2 The Executive Board and the Advisory Boards for each of the investment priorities have been reviewing and challenging the BRCD programmes and projects to ensure that they are strongly aligned with the emerging Economic Recovery Strategy. Partners have also worked intensively to progress the development of business cases across all the pillars of Investment, ensuring that key stakeholders and government partners continue to be engaged despite the communications challenges presented by the COVID crisis.**

- 3.3 The timeline for developing OBCs for all the capital projects that were outlined in the Heads of Terms has understandably had to be reviewed. As a result the BRCD partners' very ambitious target of having all business cases completed and deal documents drafted by September 2020, is no longer achievable. The partners remain determined to have a deal in place so that funding can start to flow from 1 April 2021 and discussions are ongoing with the NI and UK Governments and BRCD Partners in relation to the revised timeline to sign a 'Deal Document'.
- 3.4 As outlined in the previous report the NI Executive announced £350m match funding for the BRCD, confirming the commitment to an overall investment package from the UK and NI Governments and the BRCD partners of approximately £850M. Governance arrangements have now therefore been established by the UK and NI Governments to oversee the development of the City and Growth Deals across N. Ireland. Discussions are also ongoing with the Department of Finance to inform the Financial Agreement element of the Deal Document, but this work can only be completed when OBCs have been completed and detailed consideration has been given to issues such as timescales for implementation and affordability.
- 3.5 Communication and engagement continues to be a priority both at a project and programme level. However, planned work on strategic engagement, including both business and political engagement has been delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis. Briefing documents outlining key economic and social benefits of each project and overall BRCD programme are currently being updated to support the engagement activities that will take place in the coming months

#### BRCD and COVID Recovery

- 3.6 The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have severe and ongoing health, societal and economic impacts. The work that has been completed to date by the BRCD partners to review projects in the context of the COVID crisis has identified that overall the programme of investment is strongly aligned with the needs of the economy following the COVID crisis, building on strongest and most resilient sectors and delivering digital innovation & skills capability that is now so critical to businesses & communities. This is reflected in the synergies between the BRCD programme of investment and emerging proposals for rebuilding the NI Economy.
- 3.7 The BRCD partners recognise that the BRCD is principally a long-term programme, designed to deliver transformative capital investments to support sectors with strong potential

to sustain and create employment. However, the partners also established a digital task and finish group to identify short-term measures to boost digital skills and support digital transformation. This group has worked closely with industry and government to identify a small number of interventions that could help to improve digital literacy, skills and capability that have proven so critical in recent months and which will also be essential if the economy is to move into recovery.

- 3.8 It is recognised that that there are particular challenges in relation to the Tourism and Regeneration Pillar and, as outlined below, partners have been working intensively with government departments and agencies, such as Tourism NI, to consider the impact of the crisis on the sector and to look at how the BRCD investments could fit with the medium to long term path to recovery.

#### Investment Priorities

##### Tourism and Regeneration

- 3.9 There has been intensive engagement with partners to consider and address the impact of COVID 19 on the programme of investment. Tourism NI have commissioned and shared new analysis designed to inform plans to support the recovery of the tourism sector, examining different scenarios and how long it may take for visitors to return and this is being considered by all project sponsors as they revise and update OBCs. Importantly there is a recognition that many of the proposed BRCD projects are long-term in nature and delivery timelines will align with the expected return of international visitors to pre-COVID levels in 2-3 years. OBCs for regeneration projects are also reflecting and seeking to respond to the intensified challenges for town and city centres. As a result of this work submission of OBCs has been significantly delayed with draft OBCs, including in relation to the Belfast Destination Hub now expected between September and October 2020. A separate report on the Belfast Destination Hub will also be considered by Members at this meeting.

##### Innovation

- 3.10 This continues to be one of the most advanced elements of the BRCD programme, with recognition of the significant contribution to recovery of major investments in artificial intelligence, data analytics, advanced manufacturing and life and health sciences. The first three draft OBCs, Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC), Global Innovation Institute (GII) and Institute for Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare (i-REACH) were submitted to UK and NI government departments for consideration and review in February 2020 and are now being revised to take

account of feedback received from government, with revised OBCs likely to be completed in September. A fourth OBC, the Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT) has also now been submitted for review and has just received feedback from the NI Government.

### Digital

- 3.11 The work of Fraunhofer Institute/BABLE, to develop an implementation plan for the main elements of the Belfast Smart District and Regional Programme was significantly impacted as a result of COVID 19, but has now been completed. The outputs from BABLE are feeding into the Programme Business Case which is now being developed with the support of PWC. The programme has changed and developed significantly in recent months with an increasing focus on the use of regional challenge funds and an infrastructure fund to support the development of digital capability in the economy and the development of innovative solutions to help tackle economic, societal and environmental challenges. These funds will be critical to the delivery of the ambitions for the Belfast Smart District. The Programme Business Case is progressing at pace with the Strategic Case and Options presented to the Digital Advisory Board in August. Further workshops with the Department for the Economy have also taken place in order to progress the Economic Case and there will also be a need for detailed engagement with the UK Government in advance of finalising a draft business case.

### Infrastructure

- 3.12 Despite delays due to the COVID crisis, significant progress has been made in developing OBCs, for the Newry Southern Relief Road, Lagan Bridge and Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2.

The BRCD Team held an Infrastructure Integration Workshop in early July to provide a common understanding of programme outcomes and the role of the Infrastructure Pillar, to identify opportunities for integration and to help create connections between the Infrastructure Projects and other pillars/projects. Following this workshop draft OBCs were updated before being presented to the Infrastructure Advisory Board and submitted for consideration at the August Executive Board.

### Employability and Skills (E&S)

- 3.13 The Employability & Skills work programme has been realigned to focus on developing the proposed interventions within the thematic areas identified within the E&S Proposition, namely, Careers, Employability and Skills. To inform the proposals within each of the thematic areas

engagement has been taking place with partners and key stakeholders. A workshop session took place in July with partners to share emerging findings and seek views on emerging proposals. Further refinement of proposals, alongside the development of potential future governance models, will take place over the coming weeks and will form the component delivery elements of the Employability & Skills Programme. Work has also been progressed on the development of an inclusive growth and sustainability framework to ensure that the need for inclusion is integrated across the programme.

- 3.14 Due to the impact of COVID 19 the BRCD Executive Board agreed to fast track BRCD work in the area of digital engagement and skills. The digital skills task and finish group has identified a small number of key recommendations to partners and government that could help to strengthen digital literacy, skills and business capability.

#### **BRCD Council Panel**

- 3.15 Members will be aware that the BRCD Council Panel provides a joint forum for members from all six councils to meet to jointly discuss issues, progress and benefits of the BRCD. Each council has four members on the Forum and as agreed by this committee the four nominees from BCC are the party group leaders (or their nominees) of the four largest parties. As highlighted due to the emergency pandemic, the April and June meetings of the BRCD Council Panel were cancelled. An update was provided to Panel Members in August.
- 3.16 A virtual meeting of the panel has now been arranged for the 30th September which will be hosted by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council. At this meeting the Panel will be provided with a detailed update on progress across the programme and consider the how the programme can help to support a long-term, resilient recovery from the COVID crisis. Members will also discuss key challenges facing the programme including the challenges of communicating effectively in the current environment and how partners can rebuild momentum and improve communications and engagement.

#### **Next Steps**

- 3.17 The BRCD programme is facing a number of challenges as partners seek to ensure that the programme is progressed at pace so that it can play its part in economic recovery. Over the coming months Advisory Boards, the Executive Board, Partners and Government Departments will all need to consider the OBCs that are being finalised across all the pillars of investment. In addition, options in relation to future governance, financial plans and agreements, and deal documentation will need to be reviewed and progressed.

Additional meetings of key boards and forums will undoubtedly be required to rebuild momentum. Simultaneously there will be a need to develop effective communications and engagement with partners and political and business representatives.

**3.18 Financial and Resource Implications**

All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.

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

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

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Digital programme of work 20-21**

The Committee noted a report which outlined the projects that have been prioritised as part of the Digital Services programme of work 2020-21. It excluded business as usual activities that were operating successfully with a small amount of staff on site to provide physical support on a rota basis and with the remaining staff working very effectively from home.

**UK100 Resilient Recovery Taskforce –  
Submission to Comprehensive Spending Review**

The Committee was reminded that Belfast City Council was a member of the UK100 Resilient Recovery Task Force – a network of city Mayors (or their nominees) - aimed at influencing outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review and other government stimulus post-Covid 19, as well as influencing UK government's climate targets at COP26, the UN Climate Change conference in 2021.

The Council joined the UK100 Resilient Recovery Taskforce in July, and its first meeting of city Mayors and their nominees took place in August. At that meeting, it was agreed that the network would produce a submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Senior officers from each city council met last week via virtual workshops to agree the submission. The work was aligned with Core Cities submission.

Appendix One to the report contained the declaration, which strongly reflects Belfast City Council's discussions on inclusive recovery. The main narrative and 'asks' in the declaration are:

- The development of a Net Zero Development Bank to fund UK infrastructure aimed at driving the transition to a net zero economy
- Investment in upgrading the electricity grid. (Note: we have asked that the Energy Regulator in Northern Ireland is referenced in the declaration.)
- A government led target to decarbonise buildings and heat (a focus on retrofit very similar in ambition to the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission)
- Speed up transition to electric vehicles
- An enhanced devolution settlement- making reference mainly to devolution of powers in England, but we have asked for the document to specifically reference the need to robust powers for Councils.

The Committee would be aware that the Council continues to engage with Core Cities and a number of other structures to influence CSR outcomes and this declaration was just one of several avenues being pursued to fund climate-resilient stimulus.

The Committee approved Belfast's support for the 'declaration' and supported its submission, with the aim of influencing Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes.

### **Governance**

#### **Proposal to introduce new governance arrangements in relation to Standards**

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 seek approval from the SP&R Committee to propose the introduction of a new Standards Committee, the designation of the City Solicitor into a new 'Monitoring Officer' role responsible for all issues in relation to standards to ensure the Council, its officers and elected Members maintain the highest standards of conduct in all that they do.**

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that Members:**

- (i) note the attached report.**
- (ii) provide approval in principle to establish a Standards Committee and to designate a Monitoring Officer as in the main report below.**

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Background**

It is proposed that the Council introduces additional arrangements to ensure that the Council, its officers and elected Members maintain the highest standards of conduct in all that they do. Such arrangements could include the establishment of a new Standards Committee, the designation of a 'Monitoring Officer' responsible for all issues in relation to standards, and the introduction of a number of new governance arrangements aimed at promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and officers.

The establishment of such arrangements would demonstrate a firm commitment on behalf of the Council to promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Members within the Council and the probity of all the Council's proceedings.

Research into strong ethical leadership in the public sector (and local government in particular)<sup>1</sup> suggests that those councils with good records of ethical conduct show evidence of strong Member / officer relationships. They demonstrate a culture of partnership and joint ethical leadership led by a Standards Committee (including its independent/lay members) in concert with party group leaders (political) and senior officers (managerial).

It is proposed to create a similar regime to the model used in Wales where the Public Sector Ombudsman has encouraged councils to introduce Local Resolution Arrangements to provide an opportunity for relatively minor complaints and issues to be resolved 'in-house' without the need for referral to the Ombudsman's office.

**3.2 Standards Committee**

It is proposed that the Council establish a Standards Committee whose main functions would be to promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council and the probity of all the Council's proceedings. This would include considering and making recommendations to the Council on the contents of the Code of Conduct for Members, the Members/Officer protocol and providing advice and guidance on standards in general across the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/525252-the-importance-of-ethical-leadership-in-public-sector-organisations>

Appointment to such a Committee would be made in the normal way as prescribed by Schedules 1 and 2 of the 2014 Act. The size of the Committee will need to be agreed.

It is recommended that the Standards Committee appoint a number of independent Members whose views are to be sought and taken into account before any recommendations are made by the Committee (as is the case in similar Committees in England, Wales and Scotland). Such independents would be required to be impartial and they would be required to make the declaration at Schedule 3 of the 2014 Act that they will observe the Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Council may wish to include certain stipulations, for example that a person may not be appointed if they have been a councillor or officer of the Council in the past 5 years (or even a party worker or relative).

It is proposed that the Committee would meet quarterly and when required.

CIPFA guidance indicates that the role of a Standards Committee is distinct from that of the Audit Panel / Committee whose primary role in relation to standards and ethical conduct is to satisfy itself that there are appropriate arrangements in place, particularly in support of the Annual Governance Statement. Where a local authority does have a standards committee, the lead on promoting high standards of conduct may be taken by that committee, and the most appropriate role for the audit committee would be to consider the effectiveness of the standards committee as part of the annual governance review.

The Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee could therefore include the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by Members and officers, oversight of any training required on all matters relating standards and conduct, advising the Council on the Code of Conduct for Councillors, oversight of the Member-Officer protocol (to be reviewed), oversight of the Members' Register and Declaration of Interests and associated procedures and oversight of the Council Constitution.

The Standards Committee would also have a role in deciding whether any issues reported to the Monitoring Officer under the Local Resolution Arrangements should be closed, dealt with in house or referred to the Local Government Standards Commissioner. In such cases, the Monitoring Officer would be responsible for facilitating the local resolution arrangements alongside the Chief Executive and any Members directly involved in such cases. Once initial enquiries have been completed the Monitoring Officer will make a recommendation to the Standards Committee, based on his/her professional opinion that either:

- (i) there is no issue and the matter be closed
- (ii) the matter has been sufficiently dealt with under Local Resolution Arrangements
- (iii) the matter cannot be resolved in house and should be referred to the Local Government Commissioner for Standards

There would however be some element of flexibility in matters of urgency or potential criminal matters where a referral may need to be made directly by the Chief Executive.

### **3.3 Councillor Training on standards and conduct**

It is recommended that the Standards Committee would have oversight of Councillor training and development in relation to standards and conduct. This would include training on the Code of Conduct including the Register and Declaration of Interests but would extend to any aspect of the role of a Member that impacts on standards in general.

Surveys conducted with existing Standards Committees in other jurisdictions indicate that the preferred training by Members is scenario-based and interactive, using real life examples in areas such as:

- Training on the Member / Officer Protocol (to be reviewed with a joint declaration on protection to be developed and agreed)
- Ethical leadership
- Pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests
- Unconscious bias
- Role of members / Role of civic dignitaries
- Interacting with the public
- Interaction with the press

### **3.4 Monitoring Officer**

It is proposed that the Council designates a lead officer into a specific role, similar to the Monitoring Officer role introduced in Great Britain<sup>2</sup> to ensure that the Council, its officers and its elected Members maintain the highest standard of conduct in everything they do. It is proposed that the City Solicitor be designated as the Monitoring Officer and that they will also act as the lead officer in respect of servicing the Standards Committee.

The Monitoring Officer will be responsible for ensuring that the Council operates within the law. Their principal responsibilities will be:

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<sup>2</sup> The Monitoring Officer role is provided for by the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 (England, Scotland and Wales) as amended by schedule 5, paragraph 24 of the *Local Government Act 2000*.

- to report to the Council on matters they believe are, or may be, illegal or which amount to maladministration
- to be responsible for all matters relating to the conduct of councillors, including oversight of any Local Resolution Arrangements
- to be responsible for the operation, review and updating of the constitution; this includes providing advice on the interpretation of the constitution, and making determinations where necessary.
- to take steps to protect the integrity and reputation of the Council and Councillors in respect of Council functions and decision making.

### 3.5 Local Resolution Protocol for dealing with minor complaints

The Standards Committee will not have the same powers of investigation and/or sanction that a similar Standards Committee in England would have. In Northern Ireland the powers of investigation, adjudication and sanction are vested in the Office of the Local Government Commissioner for Standards via Section 55 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The situation in Wales is similar to that in Northern Ireland where responsibility for investigating and adjudicating on potential breaches of the Code of Conduct remain with a centralised Standards Commissioner. In Wales the Public Services Ombudsman has encouraged councils to introduce Local Resolution Arrangements which provide an opportunity for relatively minor complaints and issues to be resolved 'in house' without the need for referral to the Commissioner. A Model Protocol has been adopted by the majority of councils in Wales.

These Local Resolution arrangements are entirely voluntary and no individual councillor is obliged to participate and is free to make a complaint to the Ombudsman at any time. It is recommended that Belfast City Council introduce a similar Local Resolution Protocol as that in place in Wales which would provide a voluntary process within which the Standards Committee, the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer could act as a facilitator in dealing with complaints between Members or between officers and Members with a view to seeking an agreed resolution.

If an agreement is reached during the facilitation stage then no further action is required. If agreement cannot be reached the aggrieved Member/officer would always have the opportunity of referring the matter to the Ombudsman / Local Government Commissioner for Standards.

Examples of resolutions might include issue of a letter of apology, a written undertaking or commitment not to breach the Code of Conduct in the future, or a commitment to undertake training or an agreement that on the basis of the evidence that no further action should be taken and the matter be closed.

**3.6 Next steps**

If agreed in principle a draft Terms of Reference and more details on the operation of this committee would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement.

**3.7 Financial and Resource Implications**

There will be minor financial implications associated with introducing a new Standing Committee. If the Standards Committee is to meet quarterly then it will require an associated Special Responsibility Allowance be allocated to the Chair and Deputy Chair positions of responsibility and funded from the reallocation of the existing Special Responsibility Allowance fund.

The committee will be serviced by existing resources within Governance and Compliance; and Democratic Services.

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

None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**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 Capital programme is a rolling programme of investment which either improves the existing Council facilities or provides new Council facilities. This report seeks approval to move the reservoir Safety Programme to the next stage of the capital programme; seeks a decision from members on an electric vehicle to replace the current Lord Mayor vehicle; and asks Members to agree a request for permission to carry out aerial footage over Belfast Zoo.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is requested to –

- *Project Movement* - Agree that the Reservoir Safety Programme is moved to a Stage 3 committed project, with a maximum £1.6m budget allocated;
- *Fleet Programme - Lord Mayor's Car* - agree the Audi E-Tron as the Lord Mayor's new electric vehicle
- agree the request for permission for aerial footage over Council lands at Belfast Zoo.

3.0 **Main report**

**Reservoir Safety Programme**

3.1 Members have previously agreed that all capital projects must go through a 3 Stage approval process where decisions on which projects progress are taken by SP&R. 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.

3.2 Members are reminded that the reservoir safety programme is an agreed Stage 2-uncommitted project on the council's Capital Programme. This programme has emerged from a number of safety reports conducted in relation to addressing safety issues associated with reservoirs - the Waterworks upper, Waterworks Lower and Alexandra Park reservoirs are within the scope of the programme. An outline business case has now been completed and a preferred option identified the necessary approach to dealing with statutory safety requirements, and associated costs.

3.3 Members are asked to agree that the Reservoir Safety Programme moves to Stage 3 Committed and it is recommended that a maximum budget of £1.6m is allocated. The Director of Finance & Resources has confirmed the affordability of this project due to the importance of statutory safety requirements around reservoir management.

**Fleet Replacement Programme - Replacement of the Lord Mayor's Car**

3.4 At the SP&R Committee meeting on 21st February the Committee '*agreed to replace the Lord Mayor's car with a fully electric model, with the final decision on the type of model to be agreed by the appropriate Council Manager*'. At the Council meeting on 2nd March this decision was amended to provide that the final decision on the type of model to be selected be taken by the SP&R Committee.

- 3.5 Members are reminded that the key issue remains around acquiring a replacement vehicle that achieves value for money, offers reliability given the commitments of the Lord Mayor's Office and fulfils the function of a civic vehicle fit for high profile office (security of both Lord Mayor and Chain; wide ranging travel needs from short to long distance journeys). Members are also reminded that usage, based on typical requirements on duties of the Lord Mayor Office, shows an average mileage of 6,000 miles per year, with a typical average daily mileage of 30 miles. Whilst the usage profile is mainly around the city, there is reasonably regular requirement for longer trips, so in terms of electric vehicle, the long range performance on an electric charge, and well as comfort, is an important factor.
- 3.6 Appendix One provides a detailed overview of five vehicles available via council procurement mechanism and includes key performance information such as charge performance, safety rating (NCAP rating) and drive type (e.g. all wheel). Each vehicle has also been reviewed by Lord Mayor's Office and Fleet Management Unit to assess suitability in fulfilling the function of civic duty requirements. Feedback has been provided and included in Appendix One. Having assessed the options that are available against the key issues as outlined above in 3.5 officers would recommend the Audi E-Tron model giving the mileage capacity, the rear seating space and the boot space capacity.
- 3.7 Members are asked to consider the options and agree the recommended replacement vehicle – Audi E-Tron. The lead-in time for a new vehicle is 4-6months. The current lease is up in February 2021 and therefore Members are asked to note that a decision on the preferred new model must be taken this month to ensure sufficient time for the new vehicle to arrive. Members are asked to note that officers will be looking at the lease period in terms of value for money etc. and any lease will be for at least at 2 year period initially.

Once the new electric vehicle has been agreed, and manufacturing charging requirement is confirmed, the Property Maintenance Unit will take the necessary steps to install appropriate charging point (circa £2k cost) at City Hall.

**Request for permission for aerial footage of council lands - Belfast Zoo**

- 3.8 Members will be aware that work is ongoing on looking at Belfast Zoo. To inform this work special permission for aerial footage to be taken of the Zoo site (both the existing and old Zoo sites) is being requested in the absence of an agreed council Drone policy. Members are asked to note that all necessary licence will be sought.

### 3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

#### *Financial –*

- Reservoir Safety Programme - a maximum £1.6m budget – the Director of Finance & Resources has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council
- Fleet Replacement Programme – Lease of the Lord Mayor’s Car – these costs are covered under the Fleet Replacement Programme (costs are dependent on option to be agreed and subsequent formal procurement process); and costs for charging point will be found within existing budget.
- Aerial footage of Belfast Zoo site - costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

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

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

#### Reservoir Safety Programme

The Committee agreed that the Reservoir Safety Programme be moved to a Stage 3 committed project, with a maximum £1.6m budget allocated.

#### Aerial Footage

The Committee approved the request for permission for aerial footage over Council lands at Belfast Zoo.

#### Fleet Programme - Lord Mayor’s Car

During consideration of the replacement for the Lord Mayor’s car, it was

Moved by Councillor Beattie,  
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees that the Hyundai Ioniq be selected as the replacement vehicle for the Lord Mayor.

The Committee agreed to vote on the matter, with nine Members voting for the proposal and nine against.

As there was an equality of votes, the Chairperson (Councillor Black) exercised her second and casting vote in favour of the proposal and it was declared carried.

### Boodles Dam

In response to a request from a Member, the Committee agreed that a report on the current status of the Boodles Dam project be submitted to the next meeting.

### Assets Management

#### **Parkgate Avenue Off Street Car Park – Renewal of Licence Agreement**

The Committee approved a new licence with the Directors of Argento Contemporary Jewellery Ltd for a right to pass and repass across Parkgate Avenue Car Park.

### Finance, Resources and Procurement

#### Contracts Update

The Committee approved:

- the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1) of the report; and
- the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2) of the report:

**Table 1 – Competitive Tenders**

<b>Title of Tender</b>	<b>Proposed Contract Duration</b>	<b>Estimated Total Contract Value</b>	<b>Senior Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Short description of goods/ services</b>
Supply and Delivery of Fleet Consumables	Up to 4 years	£174,000	R Black/ S Toland	Contract for the supply of fleet spare parts and consumables to support vehicle maintenance for frontline services.
Tender for collection of and disposal of asbestos and other hazardous waste	Up to 4 years	£200,000	R Black/ S Toland	Contract for the collection and disposal of a variety of hazardous waste streams.
Supply of Paints and Sundries	Up to 4 years	£120,000	S Grimes	Contract for the supply of paint and associated sundries to support operational maintenance teams.

Strategic consultancy services for Belfast Region City Deal	Up to 1 year	£200,000	R Cregan	Contract to provide economic, financial and commercial advice in relation to achieving a Deal Document for Belfast Region City Deal
Provision of PEACE IV Youth Group Residentials	Up to 20 months	£48,000	R Black/ S Toland	PEACE IV funded project to support children and young people.

**Table 2- Direct Award Contracts (Single Tender Action)**

<b>Title of Tender</b>	<b>Supplier</b>	<b>Total Value</b>
Procurement for the purchase of forced bulbs and flower bulbs	Green Garden Ltd	£35,000
Procurement of Interfaces for the Low Income Rate Relief system (LIRR)	Northgate	£61,000

**Equality and Good Relations**

**Rural Needs: Annual Monitoring Report 2019-20  
and Review of the Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

The Committee:

- approved the submission of the Council's Annual Monitoring Return to DAERA for 2019-2020, on a holding basis, subject to ratification by the Council at its meeting on 1 October; and
- noted the recommendations from the Review of the Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 and that the Equality and Diversity Unit will co-ordinate their implementation.

### Operational Issues

#### Belfast City Council response to the Housing Executive's Draft Older People's Housing Strategy 2020/21 – 2025/26

The Committee was informed that, in February, the Housing Executive's Board had approved the draft Older People's Housing Strategy 2020/21 – 2025/26. Subsequently the Housing Executive had undertaken an external consultation exercise to seek feedback on the strategic direction the organisation has set out in the document.

The Strategy strongly supports the NIHE commitment to continue to work with existing partners and stakeholders to maximise and complement our contribution to improving housing related services for older people. This includes statutory and voluntary organisations, health and social care trusts, local councils and community planning partners.

The NIHE requested that responses provided focus in particular on the four strategic themes set out in the strategy and the accompanying high level action plans. The four high level themes are:

1. Planning for the future;
2. Promoting and maintaining people's dignity;
3. Providing housing advice for older people; and
4. Promoting participation

The corporate response followed the structure of the draft strategy issued by the NIHE. This response encompasses input from officers in City and Neighbourhood Services, Place and Economy, Civic and Legal Services and Resilience. It also reflected input from the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership and members of the All Party Older People's Group.

The Committee:

- a) noted the content of the corporate response to the NIHE draft Older People's Housing Strategy 2020/21 – 2025/26; and
- b) approved the submission of the corporate response to NIHE, and that it be submitted on a holding basis, subject to approval by Council, to meet the submission deadline of 25 September 2020.

#### Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of meeting of 8th September 2020

The Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting, noted the Annual Governance Statement at Appendix 2 of the report and approved and adopted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 8th September, 2020.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Part  
Group Leaders' Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 10th September.

**A revised Code of Conduct for  
Local Government Employees**

The Committee was advised that the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) had requested feedback on amendments to a revised Code of Conduct which had been developed by a working group, comprising representatives from Councils, the NIHE, the Department for Communities and the Trade Unions. The draft revised code is attached at Appendix 2 to the report. The amendments had been made to take account of best practice following a review of examples of similar Codes of Conduct in other public sector bodies and to address issues which Councils had reported in operating the current Code.

The consultation closes on 30th September 2020 and the working group would meet to consider the responses received. The final amended Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees would then be approved by the Commission before being issued as a statutory recommendation to Councils for implementation.

The Committee was advised further that Corporate HR, Legal Services, Audit, Governance and Risk Services, Marketing and Corporate Communications and Digital Services have input into the proposed response attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

As well as suggestions for subject matter to be included, clarification on terminology and language used, the draft response also highlights the following:

- the need for the Code to explicitly state that Councils need to ensure that supporting guidance and policies for managing conflicts of interest and gifts and hospitality are up to date, clearly communicated and well understood and that they are vitally important in underpinning the Code.
- that Belfast City Council agrees that the final amended Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees be approved by the Commission before being issued as a statutory recommendation to Councils for implementation. However, it should remain the case that individual councils are free to decide upon specific arrangements for the implementation of the code within their respective organisations.
- that it would be helpful to have clarity on the future status of the model Code as a “statutory recommendation, when the Commission is dissolved.

The working group has also sought feedback on whether the Code of Conduct should contain guidance on council employees participating in political activity depending on their role in the council.

The code accepts at the outset that staff are entitled to hold political opinions. However, it would be extremely difficult to define a set of circumstances/ or roles within which an employee could or could not participate in political activity. If specific employees were prohibited from engaging in any political activity or opinion then this could be subject to challenge. It is the view that paragraph 4.3 in the Code is wide enough to allow for some discretion and consideration on a case by case basis.

In the response it is also suggested that the Code should require that employees must declare this planned activity and seek permission before proceeding.

The Committee approved the draft response to the Local Government Staff Commission's consultation exercise on a revised Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

#### **Minutes of the Meeting of the Climate Crises Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group on the Climate Crises of 14th September.

#### **Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

#### **Application to Ulster History Circle for a blue plaque: Olaudah Equiano - Councillor McMullan**

The Committee agreed to the submission of an application to the Ulster History Circle for a blue plaque for Olaudah Equiano - former slave, merchant, author and abolitionist who lived in Belfast in the winter of 1791-1792 - on Waring Street where he lived and worked from while in the city- or at another suitable location - and to meet the costs of its installation.

It was agreed also that a report on how other events/people during that period of history could be recognised and/or commemorated be submitted to a future meeting.

#### **Babyloss Awareness Week Virtual Book of Remembrance 9-15 October - Councillor M. Kelly**

The Committee agreed to establish a Babyloss Awareness Week Virtual Book of Remembrance from 9th-15th October.

Chairperson