

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 17th June, 2022

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McDonough-Brown (Chairperson);
Aldermen Haire, Dorrian and Sandford; and
Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Bunting, Ferguson,
Groogan, Garrett, Heading, M. Kelly, Long, Lyons,
McLaughlin, Murphy, Pankhurst, Spratt and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director
of Finance and Resources;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was recorded on behalf of Councillor McMullan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th and 20th May 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 June, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Long declared an interest in respect of item 7b - Requests for the use of the City Hall, in that he was a member of the British Dental Association. However, as the item did not become a matter of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted Items

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

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Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following twelve 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.

Year-End Finance Report 2021-22

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report on the year-end financial position for 2021/22. He provided financial performance of the council in the context of the agreed finance strategy which was put in place to manage the financial impact of Covid-19. He also highlighted those balances which would be available for re-allocation on a non-recurrent basis.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee:

- note the report and agree the 2021/22 balances;
- agree to the year-end surplus of £10.6m being made available for re-allocation for non-recurrent purposes; and
- note the Year-End Treasury Management Report 2021-22.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Non-Recurrent Re-allocations

The Director of Finance and Resources reminded the Committee that it had, during discussion on the previous item, agreed that the year-end surplus of £10.6m for 2021/22 be made available for re-allocation, to progress emerging projects and essential projects which did not have a recurring budget.

Accordingly, he submitted for the Members' approval the following proposals and confirmed that, if approved, specified reserves would be set aside to ensure that the funds were available for each proposal and would be managed by the relevant Responsible Officer:

Proposal	Amount
Off Street Car Parking Pay and Display upgrade	£102,000
Kerbside Collection	£143,957
Full Shift Cover project	£259,000
Planning consultants	£100,000
Tribunal Service	£177,273
Sanitary Waste Product	£40,000
Waste Strategy	£500,000
Port Health risk	£663,000
CNS Department	£1,985,230
Vacancy Grants Programme	£300,000

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Temporary Use of 2 Royal Avenue	£500,000
Establish regeneration programme of work	£200,000
Continuation of the Business Cluster & Community Grant Scheme	£600,000
PE Department	£1,600,000
Recruitment backlog and BSC recruitment	£140,000
Local Area Energy Plan	£60,000
Programme Coordinator for the Belfast Business Promise / City Charter	£58,711
COS Department	£258,711
Support for the roll-out of the Asset Management System	£200,000
NRF Programme and project resourcing	£400,000
Roll forward Non-Recurrent Capital	£500,000
Capital contract construction cost rise risk	£500,000
PP Department	£1,600,000
Insurance reserve	£200,000
Cyber Security Reserve	£550,000
PSTN lines	£70,000
Fin Res Department	£820,000
Total	£6,263,941

The Director advised that the City and Neighbourhood Services Department was undergoing significant change and permission was also being requested to set up a transformation reserve. He explained that the departmental underspends in 2022/23 could be transferred to that reserve, subject to approval by the Director of Finance and Resources. This would enable the realignment of existing resources to fund service transformation across the department.

After discussion, the Committee

- agreed to reallocate £6.3m of the year end surplus to Departmental proposals as set out above;
- agreed to reallocate £2m of the remaining balance of £4.3m to the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund and to distribute it within the Fund on the same basis as was used for the original allocation;
- agreed to defer the allocation of the remaining £2.3m until a future date; and
- agreed to the establishment of a Transformation and Improvement Reserve in City and Neighbourhood Services Department.

Kerbside Recycling Economic appraisal and next steps

The Committee was reminded that it had requested, previously, the commissioning of an independent, economic appraisal on the future of kerbside recycling collections for Belfast. The economic appraisal was completed by the consultants (Jettora) in

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October 2021. Subsequently, the findings of the report had been presented to the Waste Programme Board (November 2021), at Party Group Briefings (February 2022) and at the Party Group Leaders Forum (May 2022).

The Operations Director Resources and Fleet outlined that the recommendations of the economic appraisal were a two-phased approach to outsourcing the implementation of the Wheelie-box model across the city. This approach was deemed as the most economically advantageous and least risk option for the Council and would be as follows

Phase 1: Implement Option 2 in the Inner City

- Council acquisition and delivery of new containers (Wheelie-boxes and 180 litre residual bins) to inner city households.
- Procurement of a new collection service contract for the inner city (includes new Resource Recovery Vehicles).
- Close monitoring of contract performance against objectives.

Phase 2: Extend the above approach to the Outer City

- Formal review of phase 1 against objectives, prior to contract expiry.
- If formal review is positive, acquisition of Wheelie-boxes and 180 litre residual bins for the outer city.
- Procurement of a contract to deliver services across the city.

Feedback from Member briefings indicated there was a general desire by Members to work towards the in-housing of the service and a more bold and ambitious approach in delivering recycling services across the city.

Accordingly, following the presentation of the findings to the Members, the Committee was being asked to adopt the following recommendations:

- agree the commencement of a procurement exercise for external expertise to assist in producing a report on the potential “in-housing” of the inner-city kerbside sort recycling contract;
- agree the commencement of a procurement exercise as outlined, for the provision of an interim, kerbside sort recycling service in the inner-city, in order to ensure service continuity upon current contract expiry in August 2023; and
- note the potential to implement glass collection to the remainder of Belfast as an interim measure and in advance of the full Kerbside Collection deployment. This would be subject to agreed funding by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee through the rate setting process.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

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**City Hall: Proposed recovery plan –
update on progress**

The Committee noted a report which provided an update in relation to the progress on the City Hall reopening and recovery.

**Dual Language Street Signs Policy
Public Consultation and EQIA**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the results of the public consultation to the proposed changes to the council's Dual Language Street Signs Policy and the conclusions reached in the accompanying Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). A report on the consultation and the EQIA final decision report had been appended to the report.

The Chief Executive reported that the public consultation had opened online on the Your Say Belfast platform on 22nd November 2021 and had closed on 28th February 2022. The survey was available in both the English and Irish languages.

There was a total of 4.4k visits to the consultation page and 1,078 written responses (785 in the English language version and 293 in the Irish language version). Officers had arranged four online public information sessions, which had a total of 4 attendees and each political party on the Council had been offered a briefing session. Information sessions had also been held for stakeholder groups, which included Irish language groups and academia, the Ulster Scots Agency and the Council's Equality Forum, Migrant Forum and Disability Advisory Panel.

The consultation survey had focused on five proposed changes to the Dual Language Street Signs policy. For four of the five questions, respondents had been asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposed changes, and they could comment if they wished. For the remaining proposed change relating to the operation of the Council's residual discretion, respondents were asked to comment. Respondents were also asked to comment on any aspect of the proposed policy that had not been addressed by the preceding questions.

The survey also gave respondents the option to comment on the draft Equality Impact Assessment running concurrently with the consultation and on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

After discussion, the Committee:

- (i) noted the results of the public consultation and the EQIA; and
- (ii) agreed that the revised Dual Language Streets Signs Policy be implemented following ratification by the Council at its meeting on 4th July.

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Cyber Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th August 2021, it had considered a cyber security update. At that meeting, Digital Services had been asked to provide further information on 3 key areas of cyber incident response:

1. The decision to pay a ransom (or not) in the event of a Ransomware attack.
2. Cyber insurance.
3. The order in which critical services will be recovered after an attack.

The Director Finance and Resources reported that the requested information had now been provided in the report. In addition, Digital Services had also been working closely with colleagues in Audit, Governance and Risk Services and Emergency Planning to seek updates to the business continuity plans of the Council's critical services. The report also contained a recommendation from that work.

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

- The Council should not pay a ransom following a cyber-attack;
- To the procurement of an Incident Response Retainer service as an alternative to Cyber insurance;
- Approval of a cyber security reserve of £550,000.
- Sign-off of a prioritised list for service recovery as set outlined Appendix 1 to the report; and
- That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance and Resources to permit the use of personal equipment and email/messaging accounts (with consent) in the event of a significant cyber-attack.

Employees on Temporary Contracts

The Committee noted a report which provided an update on the number of employees on temporary contracts, outlined the steps taken to reduce the reliance on temporary contracts and also provided information on agency assignees engaged by the Council.

Update on the New Regional Planning IT System

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided information on the progress of the implementation of the new regional Planning IT System to be shared by Belfast City Council, 9 other councils and the Department for Infrastructure. The report also included an update on the "Intelligent Client Function", which was the contract management of the new system to be undertaken by Council on behalf of the 11 participating Planning Authorities.

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Asset Management

The Committee –

- i) **Beechvale Farm– Disposal of c108 acres of agricultural land** – in line with the Committee decision of October 2021, approved the disposal of c108 acres of agricultural land to SH Long Produce Limited for the consideration of £2,000,000.
- ii) **Dunbar Link Depot – Proposed licence to Carlisle Inns Ltd for emergency escape** - Approved a licence to Carlisle Inns Ltd for a period of 18 months for use of Council lands at Dunbar Link Depot to facilitate an emergency escape.

**Levelling Up Fund Round 2 - BCC application update
and requests for support and endorsement, Shared Island
Funding and Community Ownership Funding updates**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which provided an update on the proposal to develop an application for Levelling Up Round 2 Funding (LUF) in respect of 2 Royal Avenue. The report also set out requests received from local organisations for the Council to act as a lead applicant and/or delivery agent, or to provide a letter of support, for LUF Round 2 applications.

Subsequently, information had been received on 14 June 2022 from DLUHC providing clarification on the issue of public bodies taking on the role of a lead applicant and delivery agent for applications by a non-public sector organisation that do not have experience of delivering two capital projects of similar scale in the previous five years.

The report also provided an update on Shared Island Funding and applications for the recently closed Local Authority Development Funding programme in which the Council was partnered in several projects.

The Committee;

- noted the further information provided on the LUF Round 2 application being developed by officers in relation to the future use of 2 Royal Avenue, including the planned consultation approach;
- agreed that correspondence be sent from the Chief Executive to all Belfast MPs and MLAs requesting their endorsement for the 2 Royal Avenue application;
- Requests for Council to act as delivery agent – noted the requests which had received and that, given the resource impact and lack of clarity on the financial implications for the Council, agreed that it does not accede to any requests at this time in terms of becoming delivery agent/lead partner for projects, with the exception being where the Council was already significantly funding a project and had already agreed to be the delivery agent and on that basis agreed to support the request by the Stand Arts Centre; but agreed to provide a letter of

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support in event that the Groups still wish to pursue their own application;

- Letters of support – considered the requests received from organisations as outlined in 3.17 and Table 2 of the report and agreed to endorse those through a Letter of Support;
- noted the update in relation to the Shared Island Local Authority Development Funding Scheme and the applications submitted to which Belfast City Council was a project partner;
- provided retrospective approval for a funding contribution agreed at meeting of the Corporate Management Team on 31st May 2022, on the basis that the timeframe did not permit this to be brought before this Committee;
- agreed that a future report on the wider opportunities from the Shared Island Initiative be presented to a future meeting as part of the wider report on funding opportunities which the Committee has previously agreed to receive; and
- noted the update in relation to the Community Ownership Fund.

Review of Bonfires in 2021 - presentation

The Committee received from Mr. Jonny Byrne a presentation in relation to the review of bonfires in 2021. He outlined the review of the governance framework; discussions with officers and statutory partners; feedback from communities; observations; and potential actions.

The Committee noted the presentation.

Use of the Council's Contractor

Arising out of discussion, the Chief Executive advised the Committee that a request had been received from the Department of Communities to use the Council's contractor to remove bonfire materials from a bonfire site in Derry/Londonderry.

The Committee agreed to accede to the request.

Minutes of Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Working Group of 23rd May.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

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). Including an**

update on the Funding & Governance arrangements for Belfast City Council as the Lead Authority and Accountable Body for the Deal.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the update on the role for Belfast City Council as the Accountable body and approve the creation of a post of Project Accountant to support the financial and budget management arrangements and processes at no additional cost to the Council.**
- **Note the update in relation to the key financial arrangements for the next phase of the deal, including the Financial Agreement (Appendix 2) with the Treasury and Department of Finance.**
- **Approve the Memorandum of Understanding (attached at Appendix 1).**
- **Note the programme overview.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that following the signing of the deal, Belfast City Council (BCC) took on the role of the Accountable Body ensuring that the partnership makes decisions in accordance with all legal, financial, and administrative requirements This includes the need to put in place the financial and budget management arrangements and processes to ensure the BRCD funding is managed and accounted for appropriately. The Programme Management Office (PMO) have therefore been working with partners to formalise permanent structures and resources for the delivery of the deal and to allow BCC to carry out its role as lead authority and accountable body.

3.2 In addition, the PMO has been finalising key documents with government departments which underpin the overarching signed deal document, including the development of Contracts for Funding which will be required for each of the capital projects delivered through the Deal. An update on the development of these key funding and governance arrangements is set out below.

Memorandum of Understanding

3.3 Members were previously updated on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was developed to

reflect partners' commitments to invest collectively and work collaboratively to achieve the ambitions for inclusive growth through delivery of the Deal.

- 3.4 Importantly the MoU commits each partner that will be a recipient of the capital funding provided through the deal to jointly fund the central team in BCC to carry out the functions required of the accountable body and lead authority, as well as additional external expertise that may be required to deliver the programme.
- 3.5 It also details how the partners will work collaboratively to identify and respond to the skills needs that city deal investment will create and to address the barriers to employment that might hinder ambitions for greater inclusion.
- 3.5 The final Memorandum of Understanding, which will sit alongside the formal deal documentation is attached at Appendix 1 for approval.

Contracts for Funding

- 3.7 Before funding can flow directly to projects Contracts for Funding (previously referred to as Letters of Offer) need to be agreed between departments and the Accountable Body and between the Accountable Body and Project Sponsors. Intensive work has been ongoing over a considerable period with departments and partners, including significant input from BCC legal team, to develop the overarching Contract for Funding which will form the framework for individual funding agreements. The BCC legal team has also drafted the first individual funding agreement which will be with Queen's University for the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) project. Once all final clauses are agreed, and approvals are in place, back to back letters will be signed between Department of the Economy (DfE) and BCC as the Accountable Body and then BCC (as accountable body) with Queen's University. Subsequent Contracts for Funding for further projects will be developed using the same framework and agreed clauses.

Implementation Plan and Financial Plan

- 3.8 The overarching deal document is supported by both an Implementation Plan and Financial Plan. The Financial Plan sets out the proposed spending profile for all the projects and the overall financial framework including stewardship, protocols and controls. The Implementation Plan provides

detailed information on the projects, including key milestones, financial information and funding flows, risks and outcomes. It also forms the basis of the monitoring and reporting information required for each project. Members should note that the Department of Finance (DoF) has now approved these Plans.

Financial Agreement

- 3.9 The tripartite Financial Agreement between BCC, DoF and HM Treasury sets out the financial commitments and protocols in relation to funding the BRCD. The agreement formalises arrangements between the governments and the Accountable Body that have been set-out in other deal documentation. This document, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 2 has now also been finalised and issued to DoF and UK government.

Governance and Assurance

- 3.10 The PMO, with the support of colleagues in Finance and the Audit, Governance and Risk Service, has been developing a Governance & Assurance Framework which incorporates the governance structures which have worked well to date, but also builds in best practice from other deals in relation to programme management and assurance which are appropriate for this new phase of delivery. This includes monitoring and reporting arrangements required by the Accountable Body to facilitate signing of the Contracts for Funding and Payment of Claims.
- 3.11 Given the scale of the investment and the financial management required to fulfil its role as the accountable body the team will need to recruit a dedicated Project Accountant to support the financial and budget management arrangements to ensure that BRCD funding is managed and accounted for appropriately. This will include the receipt and administration of grant funding including the establishment of appropriate accounting and reporting arrangements. This post will be funded through contributions, as committed to in the MoU, and will be of no additional cost to the organisation.

Investment Priorities

Innovation

- 3.12 Following Ministerial and DoF approval for Outline Business Cases (OBCs) the Universities have been moving projects to the next stages of delivery. To maintain momentum and avoid

the potential for delays it is vital that contracts for funding are now therefore finalised and agreed for the most advanced projects.

- 3.13 The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre and Global Innovation Institute have been focused on detailed design as their projects reach the end of RIBA Stage 2 as well as initiating operational workstreams. The Institute of Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare project is also undertaking detailed design as it moves through RIBA Stage 2 and has undertaken significant stakeholder engagement, including in relation to site specific constraints. All project governance structures are now operational, including external stakeholders on project-level implementation groups and further pump-prime recruitment is well underway.
- 3.14 The Studio Ulster project continues to progress through the procurement process for a works contractor, with competitive dialogue agreed as preferred way forward. Pre-Market Engagement has been completed including meetings with major film studios with NI Screen and Belfast Harbour in Los Angeles.
- 3.15 The Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology has now received DoF approval for its OBC. Ulster University are progressing a feasibility study to consider potential alternatives to the demolition of Northland House (driven by cost and net zero carbon agenda). Stakeholder engagement continues and discussions with Royal Victoria hospital continue to finalise equipment specifications in relation to the Living Lab element of the project.

Digital

- 3.16 The i4c Innovation Centre project, led by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council attended Casework Committee in early March and received approval from the Economy Minister during April. The project is currently addressing feedback as it seeks DoF approval.
- 3.17 Information in relation to the Advanced Wireless and Challenge Fund projects, led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the BRCD partners, is included in the SMART Belfast report

Tourism and Regeneration

- 3.18 As previously reported the four projects with approval for OBCs, Carrickfergus, Newry Regeneration, Bangor Waterfront

and Mourne Mountain Gateway, have continued development of their projects. Engagement with the Department for Communities and the Carrickfergus project team has been ongoing to agree the project specific governance document for inclusion within the Contract for Funding.

- 3.19 The Gobbins has been recommended for approval following Casework in February 2022 and DfE and DoF Ministerial approval is awaited. The revised Destination Royal Hillsborough OBC is currently progressing through the OBC review process and Belfast Stories will now progress design to RIBA 2 to enable a full OBC to be developed, working towards Casework review in summer 2023.

Infrastructure

- 3.20 Departmental officials have commenced preparations for the procurement phase of the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge to facilitate the detailed design and construction. It is expected that it will take approximately three and a half years to deliver the procurement, detailed design and construction phases of the project.
- 3.21 Work on the Public Consultation Report for Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2 is approaching final draft stage. Further development of the Outline Business Case, which will help inform selection of the preferred route, is also well advanced. DfI officials are continuing to explore potential options for funding.
- 3.22 Design of the Newry Southern Relief Road continues and preparation of the draft Statutory Orders, along with an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), in advance of statutory public consultation is ongoing. Consultation with Dept. for Communities Historic Environment Division regarding the type of bridge over the shipping canal continues and the timing of a decision on the bridge type will impact the project milestones

Employability and Skills (E&S)

- 3.23 Recruitment has been taking place to form an E&S Project team, supported through the investment of BRCD partners, to support the programme going forward. The first successful candidate recruited by Queen's University, is expected to take up post at the end of June.

3.24 Work has also continued on the delivery of the E&S Action Plan. Key areas of update include:

- **Funding Opportunities Working Group:** The group has been tasked with beginning to identify potential collaborative projects to support the skills needs in areas aligned to the city deal investment.
- **Skills Assessments – Construction:** A task and finish group has been established to undertake a skills assessment of the construction opportunities arising through BRCD capital investment to determine if and where skills challenges may exist.
- **Social Value Procurement:** The social value approach for BRCD projects will follow the Strategic Investment Board new 'points-based model'. To support the integration of this requirement within relevant contracts training sessions have been delivered with Project Sponsors with nearly 50 individuals completing the training to date. Guidance material is also being developed to support contractors during the construction phase as they deliver employability and skills related social value activity.
- **Digital Transformation Flexible Fund:** a business case has been developed to create an NI wide capital fund which will provide financial assistance to small businesses to invest in 'advanced' digital transformation. The business case is based upon an overall funding pot comprising £6m of funding ring fenced through the City & Growth Deal Complementary Fund (CF) for a cross deal digital transformation project and £1.1m of funding from DAERA earmarked to support digital transformation amongst rural businesses. If the business case is approved it is estimated that 600 businesses will be supported, accessing grant support between £5-£20k, aligned to a specific digital transformation project.
- To support the delivery of the project revenue funding is required from council partners to centrally manage the delivery of the fund. The cost implication for Belfast City Council is estimated at approximately £55k per annum, the cost of which has been accounted for within existing city deal budgets. The preferred delivery model for the operation of this fund would be via an existing digital partnership (Full Fibre NI Consortium) led by Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, through which a governance model and project management team are

already in place, enabling the fund to be mobilised quickly.

- The draft business case has been issued to Council partners for feedback, as well as informally through Invest NI and government departments. Following consideration of feedback and the necessary agreement of partners the business case will be submitted to Invest NI for formal consideration.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.25 All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

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

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

The Committee:

- noted the update on the role for Belfast City Council as the Accountable body and approved the creation of a post of Project Accountant to support the financial and budget management arrangements and processes at no additional cost to the Council and delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Resources to formalise permanent structures and resources for the delivery of the deal and to allow the Council to carry out its role as lead authority and accountable body.;
- noted the update in relation to the key financial arrangements for the next phase of the deal, including the Financial Agreement (at appendix 2 of the report) with the Treasury and Department of Finance;
- approved the Memorandum of Understanding (attached at appendix 1 of the report); and
- noted the programme overview.

Employability Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The Council’s commitments to Inclusive Growth were published in March 2020. The document contained actions that Belfast City Council would progress over the next two years, including actions relating to the role of the Council as an employer. We recognise that as a civic leader and large employer in Belfast we can and should set a strong example for others in driving best practice around employment.

1.2 Through the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Council is committed to providing inclusive recruitment opportunities and to improving participation in employment for under-represented groups by breaking down barriers to employment. This report provides an update on progress to date to support the Inclusive Growth Strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the progress to date in relation to the employment commitments in the Inclusive Growth Strategy.**

3.0 Main report

To meet our employment commitments in the Inclusive Growth Strategy we have completed the following key actions.

- **We have reviewed our employability and skills community outreach and engagement work in conjunction with key partner organisations and made recommendations to focus resources on agreed inclusive growth cohorts;**
 - **Residents not in employment**
 - **Residents with low skills levels**
 - **Young people not in education, employment or training,**
 - **In work low earning individuals**
- **We have identified a number of planned recruitment campaigns which support our Inclusive Growth aims.**

- We have committed to ring fencing suitable entry level positions, to the four inclusive growth cohorts and providing additional support through pre-recruitment training programmes.

Job Start Scheme

- 3.2 At its meeting on 5 October 2021, CMT agreed the Council's participation in the DfC funded Job Start Scheme. The scheme is designed to support young people facing additional employment challenges due to the impact of Covid-19. It has helped to create job opportunities for 16–24-year-olds by funding positions with employers across all sectors, for a period of six months, increasing to nine months for those who meet additional criteria (i.e., young people facing multiple barriers).
- 3.3 Corporate HR along with colleagues in Employability and Skills worked together on this project to recruit and appoint nine young people to temporary roles on 28 March 2022 across the following Council departments:
- City and Organisational Strategy
 - The Office of the Chief Executive
 - Place and Economy Department
 - Legal and Civic Services.
- 3.4 Four of the young people face multiple barriers to employment and secured a 9-month placement. All are progressing well and while there have been some 'settling in' issues, line managers, Corporate HR and the Employability and Skills team continue to work with these young people to ensure ongoing support, encouragement and skills development. One young person has already gone on to secure permanent employment. Staff and residents will be able to read about the success of this project in the June edition of City Matters.
- 3.5 It has been agreed with DfC that four more young people who were reserve candidates can be offered temporary roles at Belfast Zoo. It is anticipated that these young people, if still available, will start their employment by mid-June.
- 3.6 Under the Job Start Scheme, DfC fund participating organisations for 25 hours per week at the national minimum wage. Within BCC Job Start participants are paid the actual rate for the job role and this is funded by the employing departments.

Ring fencing of vacancies to the long term unemployed.

General Operative

- 3.7 In previous years when recruiting for generic roles with multiple vacancies, a number of vacancies have been ring fenced to the long term employed and potential applicants provided with support and guidance to prepare for the application process through a pre- recruitment and training programme.
- 3.8 In April with support from the Employability and Skills Unit and Workforce Training (one of the organisations contracted to deliver employment academies on behalf of the Council), a number of general operative posts were ringfenced to the long term unemployed. A pre- recruitment and training programme to support applicants facing particular barriers to employment was delivered and there was extensive engagement with employability organisations across the city and in particular with disability organisations and the women's sector.
- 3.9 Seven participants successfully completed the programme and have been recommended for appointment. Pre employment checks are underway, with appointments to be made as soon as these have been completed.

Business Support Clerks

- 3.10 A recruitment campaign for Business Support Clerks is imminent and 25% of the permanent Business Support Clerk (BSC) vacancies (approximately 10) will be ring fenced to the long term unemployed. A two week pre-recruitment and training programme will be delivered to around 20 participants nominated from employment organisations across the city. An extensive engagement exercise with employability organisations across the city is planned and in particular with disability organisations and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations.

Other employment academies

- 3.11 Employability & Skills have also been working with HR colleagues in CNS to deliver the following Employment and Upskilling Academies for BCC as an employer:
- Community Services Employment Academy to encourage and support people to apply for hard-to-fill community centre posts, with 16 people currently

completing this academy in preparation for recruitment timeframes.

- Transport Upskilling Academy for 20 OSS staff to gain their Category C (lorry driving) licence with the aim of gaining a better job. The plan here is to support an additional 20 staff.
- Scoping and planning other academies for hard-to-fill posts such as Category C and Category C+E.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.12 There are no financial implications to this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.13 Corporate HR will work closely with external employability organisations and other partners including the ECNI, to ensure equality of opportunity and alignment to our inclusive growth aspirations. Employability outreach will be targeted at people who face multiple barriers to employment.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Delivering the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee’s consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide Members with feedback on the public consultation on the new Smart Belfast urban innovation framework (2022 to 2025); and to set out the key actions in the first year delivery plan 2022/2023.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked:

1. Note the consultation feedback on the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework.
2. Note the main actions for Year 1 (2022 to 2023).
3. Approve the procurement of the pilot citizen capacity building programme (CODI).
4. Agree the development of the ‘Augment the City’ challenge programme

5. Note the ongoing Advanced Wireless Innovation programme
6. Note progress on the Belfast Region Innovation Challenge Fund programme
7. Note progress on the Urban Data programme

3.0 Main report

Consulting on the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework

- 3.1 Following approval by Members at December's SPR committee meeting, the City Innovation Team have been publicly consulting on the draft 'Smart Belfast' urban innovation framework.
- 3.2 The framework sets out a number of actions, enablers and activities which together are designed to make it easier for the city to exploit digital technologies to better address major urban challenges while at the same time supporting innovation by our SME community. The framework also seeks to maximise forthcoming funding opportunities, including the Belfast Region City Deal investments.
- 3.3 The framework identifies the Belfast 'Smart District' (covering the city centre area) as key to this approach. It will act as a place where the Council and its partners can directly develop and test real-world innovative policies, interventions and new commercial models in a supportive environment.
- 3.4 The public consultation ran from 18 January to 15 March 2022. It included presentations to over 150 people across sectors, and an online survey on the Council's 'Your Say' platform promoted via the media and other communication channels. The consultation web page received 837 visitors and 37 people completed the survey. 78% of responses were submitted by individuals and 22% by organisations.
- 3.5 The majority of responses supported the core elements of the framework:
 - 65% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the eight supporting pillars of Belfast's urban innovation ecosystem.
 - 60% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the seven key enablers for the successful delivery of the Belfast Smart District.
 - 60% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the Smart District project criteria.

- 63% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the seven challenge focus areas in the Smart District.
- 3.6 A significant minority of respondents disagreed with the use of digital technology in general in the city and view it as intrusive. They have concerns around data privacy, surveillance, cybersecurity and whether digital infrastructure in general is safe. This may reflect a lack of knowledge and an uncertainty in wider society about the speed and ubiquity of new technologies impacting our lives and our city. As a civic leader this is something the Council and its partners need to engage on proactively with residents and communities.
- 3.7 Other respondents noted the excellent opportunities that exist to harness urban innovation in Belfast and its potential to transform our economy and to also contribute to the city's wider ambition over the coming decade. A number pointed out that digital disruption was already being felt in the city and that leaders and institutions had an important role to play in responding proactively to digital challenges and opportunities.
- 3.8 Feedback from Elected Members was very supportive of the aims of the framework, and the plans for the 'Smart District' as a catalyst for urban innovation and for economic transformation. Members did note the need to ensure close links between the work taking place in the Smart District and its impact on communities and businesses elsewhere in the city particularly those living close to the centre.
- 3.9 The three-month public consultation phase was the culmination of a twelve-month phase of extensive engagement with local businesses, government bodies, academic institutions, charities and other city stakeholders, supported by BABLE, Fraunhofer IAO, Fraunhofer FOKUS, and Eindhoven Brainport. This wider engagement activity included five workshops with 176 participants and detailed interviews with 120 stakeholders.
- 3.10 Officers are now working to incorporate the findings from the consultation, and from further engagement with Elected Members and across council departments, to complete a final published version of the framework. This will be presented at the September SP&R Committee meeting prior to a public launch.

The Smart District project portfolio for 2022/2023

- 3.11 Projects and activities for the first year of the framework have been developed within the context of the Smart District and are designed to stimulate collaborative innovation activity with

public and private investment that can stimulate new ideas and solutions for the city's core challenges. Challenge areas where the District can make a significant contribution include:

- Re-imagining the future of our 'high street'
- Supporting the visitor and tourism experience
- Supporting healthy urban neighbourhoods
- Contributing to sustainable multi-modal travel and supporting the energy transition to zero carbon
- Building citizen/community capacity and skills to navigate the opportunities and challenges of our data-driven society and economy.
- Generating opportunities for our SME community to invest in R&D and innovation opportunities
- Supporting research excellence in our universities by providing greater opportunities for social impact.

The key project priorities for the first year are:

Citizen Office for Digital Innovation

- 3.12 Based on the experience of delivering 'Smart Belfast' and learning from other places (such as Dublin, Barcelona, and Portland) the team have identified the importance of proactive engagement and capacity-building with city residents, community groups, officials and elected members on the impact of digital innovation. This is also something confirmed during the engagement phase on the current framework particularly in the relation to the Smart District.
- 3.13 With the right support in place citizens are better able to collaborate with researchers, public officials, and private sector innovators on the co-design of projects that exploit innovative digital technologies to address important urban challenges. Conversely, cities that do not put this foundational work are finding it increasingly difficult to build the necessary understanding and trust amongst citizens to deliver innovative solutions. There is strong evidence¹ that scepticism of digital tech is having an impact on its use in supporting new solutions in health care, mobility, and urban design - and that this scepticism has to be actively challenged.

¹ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/when-billboards-stare-back-how-cities-can-reclaim-the-digital-public-space/>
<https://dtp.helppfulplaces.com>
<https://digitalrightsbarcelona.org>

- 3.14 The 'Citizen Office for Digital Innovation' (CODI) is a capacity building programme designed to support the citizen in a digitally enabled world – with an initial focus on the implementation of the Smart District. This support would range from supporting people to engage in data projects to improve health outcomes, through to understanding how Internet of Things and sensors can better understand local air quality or manage traffic problems.
- 3.15 CODI will be part of the city's wider 'skills escalator' offering those who participate not only the chance to shape Smart District project, but also encouraging interested individuals into more formal skills and training programmes.
- 3.16 The City Innovation team plan to work with local delivery partners to design and test a pilot version of the capacity programme with local communities starting in autumn 2022 and completing by the end of March 2023. The learning from the pilot would then shape the content of a future 'open source' capacity programme; test its core modules; and help establish a commissioning model. The results would also be used to inform future business cases for a more ambition programme.
- 3.17 Running alongside this pilot will be a strand of work focused primarily on public sector officials aimed at supporting the greater adoption of digital across government. Innovation often involves a degree of risk-taking and experimentation – something that can be difficult to manage within a public organisation.
- 3.18 Members are asked to approve £70,000 procurement for the design and delivery of the CODI citizen capacity building programme. The design of the programme would go out the public tender with bids being particularly welcome from local organisations with strong innovation and community capacity experience. (This falls within current City Innovation budget.)

'Augment the City' challenge competition for SMEs

- 3.19 As noted above, one of the early priorities of the Smart District is a focus on the visitor and tourist experience in our city centre and the 'high street'. Digital technology has already proved disruptive to city tourism offerings and, as various technologies reach maturity (such as AR/VR/5G/AI), this disruption is only likely to increase. With a large number of city and neighbourhood visitor investments planned or already underway, it is important for Belfast's partners to explore just

how such technologies are likely to shape the city's unique offering.

- 3.20 Working with the Council's Enterprise & Business Growth unit, the Belfast Stories team, Ulster University, the Digital Catapult NI and others, the City Innovation team is designing an 'Augment the City' challenge programme to commence later in 2022. The challenge programme would encourage our SMEs and innovators to harness immersive technologies to showcase innovative ways for communities and visitors to explore our city and its stories. It would complement a proposed capacity building programme being designed by the Enterprise & Business Growth unit for the local immersive SME sector (a sector that has been receiving international attention for its creativity).
- 3.21 An associated challenge 'competition' in the smart district will allow our creative sector to invest further in immersive R&D, while at the same time supporting city organisations, such as Belfast Stories, to gain insights into how immersive tech can shape the future of Belfast's visitor experience.
- 3.22 The proposal has received strong interest from a number of global platform and technology infrastructure providers with several million pounds of co-investment funding potentially being made available. Engagement is also under way with Digital Catapult UK, which is currently planning a major Immersive XR programme with cities, to consider how the two programmes could complement each other – and potentially attract further opportunities for our local creative SMEs.
- 3.23 Members are asked to note the development of 'Augment the City'; following a range of planned cross sector workshops an update will be brought to committee later in the summer detailing options for industry co-investment opportunities.

Smart District and advanced wireless innovation

- 3.24 Broadband fibre is currently the connectivity 'backbone' of the modern digital economy. However, the coming decade will see the rise of advanced wireless networks as the underlying infrastructure for connecting businesses, services, and new technologies. It's a technology that will allow many millions of devices to work together simultaneously across a city. It will be the basis on which 'Industry 4.0 Factories of the Future' and 'connected health environment' will be established.

- 3.25 Other UK cities are already vying to be first in the queue to deploy advanced wireless networks to support local innovation and research in areas such as connected health, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, tourism and logistics. DCMS have awarded over £250 million to UK cities and regions to trial advanced wireless and to address barriers to its deployment – and have plans to invest similar sums over the next period. Cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sunderland and Dublin are already investing many millions of pounds to make sure they are early adopters.
- 3.26 Belfast, and in particular the Smart District, is well-placed to be the home for wireless innovation. Both our universities have enviable track records in this space, and their planned City Deal Investment in Centres of Excellence will all have research strands that seek to exploit advanced wireless. Across our businesses and in our advanced manufacturing sector in particular, advanced wireless innovation is growing, with companies not only innovating in the wireless network service ecosystem, but also harnessing the technologies to transform their traditional products and processes. Belfast Harbour are currently exploring the use of 5G private networks to transform the management of Port operations. And public sector agencies are beginning to recognise the need to think about the opportunity that wireless represents.
- 3.27 The ambition of the Smart District is to make Belfast the natural home for the development of new commercial models for wireless services, and a place where researchers and innovators can develop new solutions. The Belfast Advanced Wireless programme is seeking to do this in four main ways:
1. Developing and managing a set of shared physical assets that can be made readily available to the mobile industry in a single, coherent and low-cost manner.
 2. Removing unnecessary barriers to investment by creating a shared approach to engaging with industry.
 3. Making a small number of capital investments in core telecoms infrastructure at key locations in the city which can be made available to any wireless provider in a coherent, low-cost manner.
 4. Stimulating demand for wireless services by aggregating existing and future demand with key partners including our universities, businesses and public agencies. And working together to bid for new funding and investment.

- 3.28 The City Innovation team have been working with industry experts and UK Government advisors, Real Wireless, to design a scalable and replicable model that can be harnessed by any council in Northern Ireland. The team are also working on a £30 million City Deal business case to fund item (3) above. A first draft of the business case for investment was recently completed, and over the coming months the city will be engaging with industry, NI Government Departments and UK Government departments towards developing agreement for funding.
- 3.29 The Smart District programme is also about stimulating and aggregating demand for advanced wireless services (item 4 above) and we are currently engaging with a wide range of partners including a number of the large mobile network operators, a large cloud platform provider, Digital Catapult UK, and others to create collaborative innovation projects for the city.

Challenge Funds for Innovation

- 3.30 The City Innovation team have recently appointed two Challenge Fund managers who are working with regional partners to develop a major funding programme to support digital innovation across the private and public sectors. This £54 million regional programme, funded via the Belfast Region City Deal, will have a number of investment mechanisms – each designed to achieve complementary outcomes.
- 3.31 The design of the mechanisms is at an early stage – however, early concepts include an evergreen ‘Digital Innovation Venture Fund’ which would invest in a small number of exciting, high potential/high growth companies in the region. In parallel an ‘Innovation for Societal Impact’ fund would seek to encourage greater investment by SMEs in R&D while at the same time working directly with these SMEs to harness their innovation for wider societal impact. This is aimed at providing a stimulus in the Smart District as well as across the region.
- 3.32 The Challenge Fund managers have commenced work on the individual business cases with the expectation that open calls for first phase one of more of the funds could be announced early in 2024. (Members should also note that the learning from the ‘Augment the City’ competition proposed above will provide early practical learning in the design and operation of these funds.)

Data, Insights and Impact

- 3.33 A key asset of the modern economy is data. Data is the most important part of the innovation economy and the fuel for digital innovation. This is widely recognised in the private sector with the most successful companies putting in place sophisticated strategies to capture, manage and interpret data for more effective decision-making. Data is also key for the effective management of the modern city and public services. While a number of public organisations have sought to develop data strategies, there is still substantial work to be done – particularly at the integrated level of a city – in order to become a truly data-driven city. The Smart District programme seeks to encourage city partners to push the boundaries in relation to data-informed decision making. The use of real-time Internet of Things sensors, Machine Learning, cloud computing and urban digital twins together offer opportunities for Belfast to think differently about complex challenges, and the capabilities to build much more responsive and bespoke solutions.
- 3.34 The City Innovation Team recently completed a data maturity project to pinpoint where Belfast City Council has to build internal capabilities to lead a data-enabled city. And our work with European Data experts, Fraunhofer FOKUS have identified the frameworks, policies and infrastructure that needs to be in place to harness data to better manage mobility solutions, climate monitoring, etc.
- 3.35 As part of the Digital Pillar of the Belfast Region City Deal, partners have identified a potential £5 million investment in a shared urban platform that can begin to make this ambition a reality. The City Innovation team will be developing its approach over the summer months to the completion of a feasibility study on a data platform and hub for the smart district and its supporting architecture.
- 3.36 Running alongside this work, the team’s Impact and Insights officer has begun work on a digital twin of the Smart District. This data-rich representation of the city centre will begin to bring together fine-grain detail on the physical, social, and investment characteristics of the area – providing decision-makers with the detail to inform planning and investment decisions.
- 3.37 **Financial & Resource Implications**
- Proposed projects have been identified in the existing City Innovation team budget.

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- **Resources for activities associated with the Belfast Region City Deal have already been identified within the existing Council City Deal budget.**

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

3.38 An equality screening was carried out as part of the consultation programme.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Council Improvement Plan for 2022-23

The Committee was reminded that the Council had a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan by 30th June each year. The Improvement Plan did not include everything that the Council plans to do that year, but instead focused on a smaller set of key improvement priorities, as informed by resident priorities and evidenced by need. In February, the Committee had approved draft improvement objectives, which were then issued for public consultation:

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

The consultation had ran for a period of 10 weeks and was hosted on our Your say Belfast engagement platform and promoted through the council’s social media channels. A total of 35 responses were received, with the majority of those responding to the consultation supporting the proposed improvement objectives.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to make comments, provide ideas or to suggest other areas that they felt should be included as improvement objectives. Around half of all respondents submitted comments, which related in general to:

- Revitalising the city centre;
- Climate change and the environment;
- Improving public transport, cycling provision and parking;
- Enhancing green spaces and improving safety and wellbeing;
- Improving cleanliness and addressing dog fouling; and
- Internal council processes (including comments about the survey)

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The final improvement plan included actions that reflect the commentary above, such as the city centre 'Vacant to Vibrant' scheme, digital enhancements to improve customer interactions, improvements to pest control and various environmental enhancements to our parks and open spaces, which should help the Council deliver the broad improvements that respondents wished to see. The written comments from the consultation had been forwarded to the relevant services for information and, where applicable, had been fed into the ongoing review of the Belfast Agenda. Some of the issues raised are not the responsibility of Council.

Given the high levels of support, as evidenced by the consultation, it was not felt necessary to make changes to the proposed improvement objectives. However, feedback from the consultation was shared with services to help them develop their improvement tasks and milestones. As required by the legislation, a detailed Improvement Plan has been drafted that sets out our improvement actions and targets.

The Committee approved the draft 2022-23 Council Improvement Plan attached at appendix 1 to the report. As the Council was legally required to publish its improvement plan by 30th June, the Committee also authorised its publication on the Council's website, subject to formal ratification by Council on 1st July.

**Access to Council Leisure Facilities
for Asylum Seekers**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To present proposals for asylum seekers in Belfast to access Council leisure facilities.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The committee is requested to consider:

- **The proposal below to grant registered asylum seekers access to Council leisure facilities free of charge or at a substantially reduced rate.**
- **The rationale presented in support of the unique restrictions and hardships associated with living under asylum seeker status.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

In recent years, resulting from conflicts around the world, we have experienced an increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Belfast. The relatively small but steady stream has

accelerated during high profile conflicts/migrations in for example, Syria, Afghanistan and more recently Ukraine.

Asylum seekers experience a unique set of hardships while waiting for government determinations on their asylum seeker status.

City and Neighbourhood Services has received a number of requests seeking free of charge or substantially reduced rates for asylum seekers to access our leisure facilities.

- 3.2 Offering concessions solely to asylum seekers does present equity dilemmas, however it should be acknowledged that the situation for asylum seekers is slightly different for the following reasons.

Asylum seekers experience a greater level of hardship as:

- a) they cannot access the labour market.
- b) they cannot open a bank account.
- c) many do not have a residential address (as most are accommodated in hotels).
- d) their allowance of £39 per week is about half of what others on benefits would receive.
- e) they are extremely isolated and many are suffering from the trauma of the refugee journey.
- f) mental ill-health is particularly high.
- g) they are not able to work and don't have established family networks here, leading to extreme isolation which hampers their sense of integration and inclusion in Belfast.

The Home Office does not produce exact figures for asylum seekers. However, the total for Northern Ireland is believed to be circa 2,500. The proposal below would only apply to asylum seekers housed in Belfast accommodation.

- 3.3 Most asylum seekers are assessed within a few months but unfortunately in some cases there are long delays and in extreme cases they can remain as asylum seekers for in excess of twelve months.

Following assessment asylum seekers are either deported, where their application is rejected, or granted 'refugee' status, if their application is upheld. When an asylum seeker is reclassified as a refugee, they immediately have access to housing, the labour market, banking services, health care and

income support. Essentially the same rights as any other citizen.

- 3.4 Leisure provision can be key to asylum seekers' long-term integration but moreover, in the short term, an essential means of alleviating isolation, mental health issues and the trauma associated with the refugee experience.

£39 per week is already a struggle for people paying for food, mobile data to communicate with family, buying clothes to suit local weather conditions, toiletries, bus passes, etc. plus children's essentials from nappies to schooling items.

Our current concession rate for Health & Fitness Membership is £18.30 per month (£36.55 full price). The concession rate would put membership of our leisure centres beyond the reach of asylum seekers living on £39 per week. A Health and Fitness Membership package includes access to all centres for gyms, pools and classes plus some facility bookings.

Attached at Appendix 1 is a Briefing paper produced by the Law Centre which supports this initiative.

3.5 Proposal

That members consider:

- a) Free of charge Health and Fitness Membership for asylum seekers for a period of 3 months, and
- b) A reduced rate of £5 per month, for subsequent 3 month blocks, for Health and Fitness Membership for the duration of their asylum seekers' status (to be renewed every 3 months).

- 3.6 GLL have confirmed that they are in agreement with the above proposal and the resulting processing implications.

Summary

Members are asked to consider the background information provided and the special circumstances associated with being an asylum seeker. In particular the specific restrictions set out above at 3.2.

Members are further requested to consider the free of charge and reduced rate proposal set out above at 3.5.

Communications & Public Relations

3.7 None

Financial & Resource Implications

3.8 There would be no additional expenditure associated with the above proposal for BCC or GLL.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.9 This report has been prepared in consultation with officers from the Council's Equality and Good Relations unit and in full acknowledgement of the equity considerations involved."

After discussion The Committee agreed:

- to grant newly arrived Ukrainian refugees, refugees and registered asylum seekers access to Council leisure facilities free of charge until status was granted, with a further report to be brought back to the Committee on how this could be extended to destitute asylum seekers;
- noted the rationale presented in support of the unique restrictions and hardships associated with living under asylum seeker status;
- noted that the Chief Executive would undertake to convene a meeting of relevant stakeholders to see what further actions the Council could take to help asylum seekers within the city; and
- that a report be brought back to the Committee outlining any means by which the Council or GLL could potentially reduce the admission and/or membership fees for leisure centres for Belfast ratepayers.

Freedom of the City – Frontline Workers and COVID Response

The Chief Executive submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out:

- An update for Members on a public facing event to recognise the work of the city's frontline during the COVID19 pandemic.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report including the outline of the event to take place on 25th August 2022.

3.0 Main report

3.1 At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 22nd May 2020 it was agreed to award the Freedom of the City to healthcare workers and all those working tirelessly on the frontline to care for vulnerable citizens during the COVID pandemic, with Members agreeing that a report outlining proposed arrangements for this to be submitted in due course. A further report was submitted to committee on 23 April 2021 which agreed a proposed programme, to include both a reflective event of commemoration as well as a citywide recognition event with community participation.

Participative Programme aligned to UNESCO City of Music - completed

3.2 From September 2021 to March 2022 Council delivered a participative music programme with a variety of groups across Belfast to explore their experiences of pandemic via musicians in residence programme. This programme has resulted in each of the groups working with a local musician to compose a new piece of music. The creative outputs of this programme will now be showcased through:

- Celebratory event at 2 Royal Avenue
- An exhibition of the project to be toured to locations across the city including local festivals
- A documentary capturing personal stories of life through the pandemic
- An album of the music recordings

3.3 There will also be an opportunity for some of these elements to form part of the Belfast Stories project.

Honouring the contribution of city's frontline workers and communities Waterfront Hall, 25 August 2022

3.4 A concert will take place at the Belfast Waterfront on Thursday, 25 August 2022 to include a ceremonial element marking Freedom of the City. Council officers have been working in partnership with BBC NI on this project. Music has played an important part in people overcoming the challenges of COVID-19 and creatively it is the ideal artform to signal the city's ongoing recovery. This also celebrates Belfast achievement in becoming a UNESCO City of Music in November 2021.

- 3.5 The official Freedom of the City ceremony will take place as part of this music event commemorating this unique project. This main stage event will include profiled acts, breakthrough artists, the Ulster Orchestra and live performance of the songs produced with the participants of the musician in residence programme. There will also be involvement from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust choir. The full artist line-up for the event is being finalised and will be released in due course.
- 3.6 The concept for the evening is to focus on songs that have a particular meaning to the city and associated with the city's Covid response. These songs will form a Belfast Mixtape and have been selected by frontline workers and community participants.
- 3.7 In addition, there will be a screening of a specially commissioned film that captures the city's response to COVID and personal stories through this unique project.
- 3.8 The final outputs from the overall programme include:
- Direct Community Participants: 60 participants across 6 groups over 6 months of workshops and engagement
 - 3 Story-gathering facilitators aligned to Belfast Stories
 - Core musician team of 5, with a lead Music Director
 - Ulster Orchestra and headline music acts for the closing event at Waterfront Hall
 - Film produced capturing the individual 'Belfast Stories' of COVID
 - Broadcast of event with BBC NI
 - Podcast and ancillary content
 - Immersive and commemorative exhibition about the project and stories
- 3.9 This special Freedom of the City project seeks to reflect the remarkable efforts of the city throughout the pandemic and has at its core an ethos of being both a caring and a creative city.

Event Delivery:

- 3.10 Given that the event marks the conferment of the Freedom of the City. It is proposed that the process is as follows:
- The wording of the Notice of Motion will provide the context for organisation to be awarded tickets.

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- It is proposed that partner organisations, including Belfast City Council, receive an allocation of tickets to the concert.
- Each organisation will be responsible for managing their own allocation directly with the Waterfront Box Office, with tickets made available online or hardcopy and dispersed as appropriate by each organisation.
- It will be up to each organisation to decide on their own criteria for which staff members can access tickets.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.11 No additional resources are required. The programme costs will be met from within existing budgets due to existing plans for a city event to mark the bid for UNESCO designation.**

Equality & Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.12 The overall programme of events include elements that have been open to all and as such has the potential to promote good relations and equality by bringing together people from a wide range of backgrounds. City of Music Events are part of the cultural strategy for Belfast that has been subject to EQIA.”**

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Area Working Update

The Committee:

- Approved and adopted the most recent Area Working Group minutes (*South – 23 May, North – 25 May, West – 26 May and East – 31 May*) attached at appendix 1 to the report.
- Physical Programme – Agreed the recommendations in respect of Local Investment Fund (LIF) projects and reallocations from the East Area Working Group as set below:
 - £70,000 to Cycling Ireland towards the Henry Jones BMX/ cycle track project (ELIF29);
 - £70,000 to the Cregagh Sports Club (ELIF30);
 - £30,000 to provide storage facilities for Bloomfield Football Club, Clonduff Football Club, East Belfast Football Club and Glentoran Academy (ELIF31); and that the remainder of the funding be ringfenced for the Bloomfield
 - Community Association (approx. £60,009).

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Procurement Policy

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

1.1 The Commercial & Procurement Service (CPS) presented its 3 year Transformational Strategy to Chief Officers in September 2020.

1.2 To support this, the Procurement Development Team within the CPS has developed a corporate-wide Procurement Policy to establish the legal authority of the procurement function within the Council and to simplify, clarify and reflect legislation governing procurement.

1.3 The Procurement Policy is important as it sets out the method and the governance arrangements (i.e. approvals required) associated with any money spent by the Council on the goods, services and works that are required to enable it to deliver its services. It details what the Council expects from its officers in terms of behaviour, actions taken, and the processes to be followed for all procurement activity.

1.4 This Policy will apply to all Council Officers involved in the execution of works, supply of products or the provision of service contracts. We recognise that procurement is cross-cutting throughout the organisation and therefore, the policy has been designed to also act as a critical link to other relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures that involve procurement activities e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- 1. Approve the Procurement Policy; and**
- 2. Approve the approach to adopting and implementing the Policy.**

3.0 Main report

- 3.1** The overarching aim of the Procurement Policy is to establish the delegated authority of the procurement function within the Council and to simplify, clarify and reflect legislation governing procurement. Primarily, the Policy brings together existing legislative and policy requirements, as set out in the Council's constitution, and introduces best practice relating to procurement activity e.g. new mandatory training and a revised documented approach for all officers to adhere to when evaluating tenders.
- 3.2** This Policy will be important for Council Officers and suppliers as it sets out the method and the governance arrangements (i.e. approvals required) associated with any money spent by the Council on the goods, services and works that are required to enable it to deliver its services. It will act as a 'golden thread' between the Transformation Strategy and day-to-day procurement operations. It details what the Council expects from its officers in terms of behaviour, actions taken, and processes followed for all procurement activity.
- 3.3** This Policy will apply to all Council Officers involved in the execution of works, supply of products or the provision of service contracts. We recognise that procurement is cross-cutting throughout the organisation and therefore, the policy has been designed to also act as a critical link to other relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures that involve procurement activities e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability.
- 3.4** To support the implementation of our Procurement Policy, we have taken a 'bottom-up' approach which involved the following initial steps:
- 1.** Developing, implementing, and monitoring processes and procedures for end-to-end procurement activity at all values and for each procurement method, including:
 - a.** Quotation and tender competitions;
 - b.** Use of framework agreements; and
 - c.** Use of Single Tender Action process.
 - 2.** Introducing supporting documentation such as template forms, process checklists and guidance.
 - 3.** Introducing the requisite levels of approval, in line with the Council's constitution.

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4. Ensuring staff are equipped with the right skills to enable us to adopt best practice and to conduct legislatively compliant processes and procedures. Training is available on a regular schedule.
 5. Ensuring staff are guided to relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures (as appropriate) e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability.
 6. Introducing a culture of continuous improvement through regularly seeking feedback on the processes, support, guidance and training available.
- 3.5 In terms of monitoring the performance of the processes and procedures documented within the Policy, CPS will report annually to the Commercial & Procurement Panel, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Strategic Policy & Resources (SP&R) Committee (as appropriate) on procurement activities. Monitoring will also continue to evolve in line with the introduction of enhanced reporting functionality through the Council's new finance system ('go-live' planned for April 2023).
- 3.6 The next phase of policy implementation will include the development of a communication and engagement plan to ensure Officers are equipped with the requisite skills to comply with the policy. The individual tasks related to this phase will be captured in the CPS annual Roadmap which is monitored via the Commercial and Procurement Panel.

Financial & Resource implications

- 3.7 This programme of work will be managed as part of the CPS's annual revenue budget.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.8 No implications at this stage."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in appendix 1 (Table 1);

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- approved the award of Single Tender Actions (STAs) in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in appendix 1 (Table 2);
- noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in appendix 1 (Table 3);
- noted the award of contracts by Arc 21 on behalf the Council (Table 4); and
- approved the verbal request by the Director of Finance and Resources to tender for the supply of natural gas should the Council's current supplier, Go Power, be unwilling/unable to continue to offer the Council suitable terms to extend the contract:

Appendix 1

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Home safety equipment – supplied to families following a home safety assessment. Funded by Public Health Agency	Up to 4 years	£200,000	S Toland	A new regional tender for home safety equipment is being set up by AND Borough Council – BCC is named on this tender.
CPD Contract for Procurement cards for use throughout the organisation	Up to 3 years	£180,000	R Cregan	Used for expenditure that cannot be procured through SRM ordering processes. Contract generates 1% payback on expenditure. Utilising CPDs contract (BCC contract ref T2088).
Procurement of an operator for the two-year temporary Active Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens Fully Funded	Up to 2 years	£35,000	C Reynolds	BCC has received an offer of funding from PHA and Ulster University to fund an operator for the Active Travel Hub in Cathedral Gardens, that will be responsible for providing active travel information, programming and training from the Hub.
Collection and Treatment/Recycling of Mixed Materials from Recycling Centres	Up to 4 years	£2,000,000	C Matthews	Current contract is ending and a new procurement process is required. Supports the Council with

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				its waste management operations.
Provision of Kitchen Canopy Assessment /Cleaning for Cooking Protection at various Council Properties	Up to 4 years	£200,000	S Grimes	Service required to ensure than all kitchen canopies in Council property have an assessment and clean carried out by a competent contractor.
A grants management system providing online application and management of grants streams	Up to 4 years	£95,500	R Cregan	Current contract expires August 2022. Continuity of service required to support grant applications process.
Develop and pilot a bespoke capacity building programme and toolkit that will enable citizens and communities to fully engage and collaborate in digital innovation	Up to 7 months	£70,000	J Tully	There is currently no provision in place to support the participation of citizens and communities in digital innovation. Support is needed to enhance public understanding of data and digital technologies in the public realm.
Procurement of consultancy team to develop an Outline Business Case for the Innovation for Societal Impact Challenge Fund under the Belfast Region City Deal's Digital Pillar	Up to 6 months	£100,000	J Tully	An Innovation for Societal Impact fund is a key element of the overall suite of BRCD (City Deal) Innovation Challenge Funds as outlined in the digital pillar Programme Business Case.
Develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) for a £20m risk capital, Venture Fund, funded by the Belfast City Region Deal	3 months	£50,000	J Tully	An equity debt fund is a key element of the innovation Challenge Fund as outlined in the digital pillar Programme Business Case.
Further develop a suitable governance structure for the future management of the Forth Meadow Community Greenway Peace IV	Up to 9 months	£60,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	This will be a key step in the Greenway's development and the applicant will need to further engage with all the relevant community stakeholders and with the co-designed, together with those who will be involved and affected.

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Supply and installation of wet pour safety surfacing repairs	Up to 4 years	£400,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	Repairs to safety surfacing – Council playgrounds
Supply and delivery of cleaning materials for BCC stores	Up to 5 years	£360,000	S Grimes	BCC stores manage the purchasing and disbursement of these items to facilitate departmental requisitions

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Total Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
To procure Scarab Truck Mounted Road Sweepers Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet	Up to 3 years	£135,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	To ensure that the OEM approved engineering parts and components are replaced and fitted to Scarab Truck Mounted Road Sweepers in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions.	McCreath Taylor NI Ltd
Renewal of support and maintenance for MapInfo mapping software *Previously approved CMT Feb 2022 & SP&R Mar 2022 for £57,000	Up to 3 years	£75,000	R Cregan	MapInfo has 130+ users across the council and is used to provide council-wide mapping functionality. Significant investment has been made in user training and existing knowledge. The platform has been extensively used to provide developed functionality and projects.	CDR Group

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Temporary experienced accountant required in Finance to support the implementation of the new finance system	Up to 18 months	£100,000	R Cregan	The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required role of Temporary Accountant within the contractually agreed time period to find a suitable candidate.	VanRath
To procure Iveco Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet	Up to 3 years	£135,000	C Matthews	To ensure that the OEM approved engineering parts and components are replaced and fitted to Iveco Vehicles in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions.	NI Trucks
To procure DAF Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet	Up to 3 years	£120,000	C Matthews	To ensure that the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components are fitted to DAF Trucks in keeping with the manufacturer warranty terms and conditions.	TBF Thompson Ltd
Development of PEACEPLUS	Up to 4 years	£48,500	R Crozier	There has been 2 failed procurement attempts through	Blu Zebra and Locus Management

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Local Community Action Plan				quotation and tender exercise. Blu Zebra and Locus Management (consortium bid) have been identified as the most appropriate contractor for this piece of work.	
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Table 3: Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Duration	Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
Requirement for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and Technical Support Officers (TSOs) are required for 24hr shift rota cover for essential service delivery within the Port Health service Fully funded	Up to 6 months	£100,000	S Toland	The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required roles of Environmental Health Officer (Port Health) and Technical Support Officers within the contractually agreed time period.	MCS Group

Table 4: Contracts awarded by Arc 21 on behalf of the Council

Contract Title	Duration	SRO
Municipal Waste Disposal Contract – Lot 2	Extend for 3 months until 31st October 2022	Cathy Matthews

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**Audit Risk Panel Annual Report including
Annual Governance Statement**

The Committee:

- noted the summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel during 2021/22;
- approved the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 at appendix A to the report and, in particular, the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement; and
- approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 7th June 2022 at appendix B to the report.

Equality and Good Relations

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Shared City Partnership**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Shared City Partnership of 6th June, including the recommendations set out below:

PEACE IV

Shared Spaces & Services

- To agree in principle the FMCG Governance Model Interim Report (April 2022);
- To agree the procurement of a suitable contractor to implement the Governance model; and
- To agree the Narratives for the Information Panels on Section 3 (Whiterock/Falls).

Building Positive Relations

BPR 3 Transform for Change

- Agree the allocation of the £1500 available per project to engage local communities on the project concept is realigned to enable post evaluation and showcase the project.

BPR 4 Centenaries

- Agree the request for a direct award payment to BATW providers, Corrymeela to take forward facilitation of the EU/NI study visits.

BPR6 St. Comgall's

- To note approval of the modification to amend a case study trip from NI to ROI (Monaghan) and an external best practice visit from Wolverhampton to Bellaghy.

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Good Relations

BCC7 Interfaces

- Belfast Interface Project to be awarded £3,407 towards the Shared Futures Project taking place between July 2022 and March 2023.
- TAMHI to be awarded £3,900 towards the Golf for Wellbeing project taking place between July and October 2022.
- Intercomm/ DCP to be awarded £15,000 towards Peace in the Park event, Alexandra Park on 10th September 2022.
- Westland Shared Space Project - £1,500 to be awarded towards good relations workshops and signage to promote and encourage shared use of space.
- Blackmountain Shared Space Project to be awarded funding of £2,000 towards a Youth Leadership Development Programme to take place later in the financial year
- Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum to be awarded £5,626 to work in partnership with Limestone United to deliver facilitated cross community training/educational sessions for young people in the Manor Street/Cliftonpark and the Oldpark areas.

Update on Action Plan Activities to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inclusion

- To grant authority for the funding of £12,000, as identified in the action plan, to be used to support the Roma Community to provide outreach through the Roma Hub and engagement activities over the Summer and Autumn months
- To agree that, following the lack of submissions for the Leadership Development of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Other Young people Programme, the funding assigned to this programme be reassigned to the Ukraine Advice Hub initiative.

Diversity Action Plans

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To agree the budget and appropriate resources for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and LGBT+ Action Plan Year 2 activities.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- **Agree the proposed diversity action plans and associated year 2 costs.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Our Equality and Diversity Framework outlines how we will tackle inequalities and promote diversity in our city. It is built around four key priorities:

- A. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment**
- B. Understanding our communities through data and consultation**
- C. Delivering services accessible to all**
- D. Developing a skilled and diverse workforce**

3.2 The Framework includes a series of actions to be delivered to help achieve these priorities and under Priority A, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment, the Council has committed to developing and delivering a Gender Action Plan, LGBT+ Action Plan and a Race Action Plan.

3.3 At its meeting on 10 May 2021, Women's Steering Group agreed a three-year GAP for delivery between April 2021 to March 2024. Year 2 of the current GAP has been costed and is being presented to Committee for approval. In addition, HR has developed a three-year LGBT+ Action Plan for 2021-24, in collaboration with the LGBT+ staff network and this is also being presented, with costs for year 2, for approval.

Gender Action Plan (GAP)

3.4 Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.

3.5 The GAP (21-24) was agreed by the Council in July 21 following consultation with Women's Steering Group (WSG) the Women's Network and the wider group of staff that attended a Gender Inequalities workshop in January 2021.

3.6 Year 1 achievements / projects delivered include:

- Delivering of various virtual development and awareness raising events and workshops to mark and celebrate International Women's Day
- Funding provided for external International Women's Day event in city centre
- Participation in the NI Gender Diversity Charter assessment- first public sector organisation in NI to achieve Silver level accreditation
- Gender Identity and Expression Guidance developed and implemented
- Developed a Menopause Policy and Guidance
- Onus Domestic Violence Charter (employer award) – retained Platinum level
- Onus Safe City Accreditation - retained
- Ongoing support for the Raise Your Voice Project to help address misogyny, sexual harassment and violence

3.7 Our joint elected member and senior officer Women Leaders' Programme is also due to commence in June, continuing to October 2022.

LGBT+ Action Plan

3.8 The LGBT+ Action Plan (21-24) was agreed by the Council in July 21 following consultation with the Proud Staff Network and senior LGBT+ champions. The plan for year 2 (attached at Appendix Two) sets out our proposed activity and costs. It has been developed to ensure that our organisational culture and working environment allows staff to feel comfortable to be their whole selves at work and that policies and practices empower talent development at all levels and the removal of any form of discrimination. It also aims to increase the understanding of the wider workforce of issues facing the LGBT+ communities.

3.9 Year 1 achievements / projects delivered include:

- LGBT+ inclusion and awareness training
- Specific LGBT+ awareness training for senior leaders
- Trans awareness training
- Bi identity awareness training
- Mental Health First Aid for Proud network members
- Development and implementation of Gender Identity and Expression Guidance

- Continued promotion, visibility and growth of staff network
- New senior champion identified– profiled on staff intranet
- Staff and family Pride Walk
- The display of Rainbow and Trans flags and lighting up of City Hall.
- Achieved Gold Award in Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index

Disability Action Plan

- 3.10 CMT should also note that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (‘DDA’) Section 49 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and to the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. The Equality and Diversity Unit is in the process of reviewing and revising the Disability Action Plan.

Race Action Plan

- 3.11 It was recently agreed to appoint the Director of City & Organisational Strategy as a Race Champion to lead a Race Equality and Diversity Action Group and oversee the development of a Race Action Plan. This work will review how we deliver our services and actions that we can take as an employer to create a more diverse workforce, and as a city leader, to influence and bring about change.
- 3.12 It has also been agreed that the Council signs up to the Business in the Community initiative ‘Race at Work Charter’ to learn from best practice and gain support in developing our approach, agreeing actions and setting achievable goals and targets. The first meeting of the Race Equality and Diversity Action Group will take place in the coming weeks.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.13 The cost of delivery of the proposed Gender Action Plan year 2 activities is estimated at £48 000. Please note this includes previously approved activity carried over from 2021/22 which could not be progressed because of the pandemic. The cost of delivery of the LGBT+ Action Plan year 2 is estimated at £9700. Both plans will be met from the existing Organisational Development budget.

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- 3.14 The plan also identifies the role that individual business units and departments have in delivery of the plan.**

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.15 The delivery of the Gender and the LGBT+ Action Plans will result in positive outcomes. The promotion of equality and diversity entails more than the elimination of discrimination, it requires proactive action. The actions contained within both plans will not only impact on internal operations but also have a positive impact externally on women and men and the LGBT+ community in our city.”**

The Committee approved the diversity action plans and associated year 2 costs.

Request made by Councillor McMullan at Council Meeting on 1st June 2021 – Sign Language

The Committee was reminded that, at the request of Councillor McMullan, the Council on 1st June 2020 had agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the potential to work with deaf people and the Department for Communities to promote and roll out classes or training to local community and voluntary groups. However, due to an administrative error, this was only passed to the Equality and Diversity Unit in December.

The Chief Executive reported that the Council had launched its Language Strategy in April 2018. The Strategy committed to establishing a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city. There were five language strands within the Strategy, including Sign Languages. The Council also had a Disability Action Plan (2019-2022) which consisted of action measures related to Sign Languages.

Work to date in relation to Sign Languages

British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter

In March 2019, the Council signed up to the British Deaf Association’s British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter and one of the pledges which was made was to ensure Council staff working with Deaf people could communicate effectively using British Sign Language and/or Irish Sign Language.

Sign Language Users’ Forum

A Sign Language Users’ Forum consisting of local Sign Language users was established in June 2019 and meets twice a year to advise, guide and support the Council to respond better to the needs of Sign Language Users in Belfast.

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Staff training

In the current Language Strategy Action Plan and the Disability Action Plan, a number of action measures were listed to support Sign Language users, including the delivery of Sign Language courses for Council staff and providing guidance on how to communicate with a Sign Language user.

A pilot Sign Language course for a pool of front-line Council staff was completed in October 2019. Additional courses were put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic and feedback indicated that the course was best delivered in a face-to-face setting.

Department for Communities

The Department for Communities (DfC) provides funding to a number of Deaf organisations who are members of their Sign Language Partnership Group to deliver Sign Language projects, including classes and courses for local communities. Further information on this can be found at [Sign language | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](https://communities-ni.gov.uk).

Council officers had recently met with the Head of Sign Language Policy at the DfC Language Branch. The Language Branch was currently reviewing membership of its Sign Language Partnership Group and a new sub-group consisting of public authorities, including local Councils was being considered. This would enable Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities to potentially work together to identify initiatives, including funding to support voluntary groups and businesses to provide Sign Language courses. Any related actions would be considered by the Language Strategy Working Group and members would be kept updated.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

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 9th June.

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

The Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations in respect of those applications received up to 3rd June, as set out below:

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2022 EVENTS						
British Council	16 Nov 2022	<p>Mock COP27 – The debate engages students (aged 16-18) from approx. 30 schools in Northern Ireland to debate live and topical COP27 issues through a climate negotiation simulation.</p> <p>Numbers attending; 130</p>	D	No (Reg. Charity)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
2023 EVENTS						
JoinHer Network CIC	3 March 2023	<p>International Women’s Day 2023 Dinner Event – A event to encourage women to celebrate diversity, inclusion, equity and equality in a safe environment to share and support, network and raise awareness of topical issues.</p>	D	No (Not For Profit)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

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		Numbers attending; 80				
British Dental Association NI Branch	7 October 2023	British Dental Association NI Branch Centenary Dinner – Gala Dinner with speeches and after dinner entertainment. Numbers attending; 300	C	No (Not For Profit)	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No charge Wine Reception <i>or</i> £500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on tables

Minutes of the Meeting of the Active Belfast Board Limited

The Committee noted the minutes of the Active Belfast Board Limited of 6th June.

Minutes of Meeting of the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group of 31st May.

Minutes of the Language Strategy Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Language Strategy Working Group of 10th June, subject to the amendment of the minute in relation to the 'Proposals in the draft action plan, to provide that, rather than a report on the potential to create a sign language forum, the Committee agrees to establish a Sign Language Forum.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

City Cemetery - Bi-lingual Signage – Councillor Beattie to raise

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Beattie raised the issue of the lack of bi-lingual signage at the new visitor centre at and throughout the City Cemetery, with English only and no Irish having been used at a site located within the Gaeltacht Quarter. Accordingly, he requested that this be rectified, with interim measures being put in place prior to something more permanent.

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The Committee agreed that, in the interim, the use of bi-lingual signage at new developments be brought to the Committee for consideration until a policy had been established and, in addition, agreed that dual language signage be installed at the City Cemetery and interim measures be adopted to facilitate this for the opening.

Chairperson