

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 21st June, 2024

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson); and
Councillors Beattie, Black, Bunting, Cobain,
R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Long, Maghie, R. McLaughlin, Nelson
and Whyte.

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

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Councillors de Faoite, M. Donnelly, McDonough-Brown and I. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd, 24th and 31st 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 3rd June, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Duffy, Groogan and Garrett declared an interest in item 5c – Update on Hardship Programme in that they worked for or were associated with organisations which received Social Supermarket Funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under discussion.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

2023-24 Year End Finance Report

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee's consideration a report on the year-end financial position for 2023/24, together with the Quarter 4 finance report and year-end treasury position.

The Committee:

- noted the report and agreed the year end position;
- agreed the creation of a specified reserve for the Leisure VAT claims repayment;
- agreed to a facilitated workshop on financial context setting; and
- noted the Year-End Treasury Management Report 2023/24.

Area Working Groups Update
June 2024 East NRF

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the special meeting of the East AWG of 28th May, including the recommendations of the AWG which were:

- i. To note the update on the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund;
- ii. To note the information on the Stage 2 projects;
- iii. To recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the following projects be progressed to *Stage 3 - Delivery* in East, with the allocations as outlined:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- EastSide Property Belfast Ltd. - Eastside Container Hotel, £950,000
 - Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre - Portview Exchange, £600,000
 - East Belfast Mission – Hosford Community Homes, 335 Newtownards Road, £300,000
 - Dundela FC – Development of Sporting Hub at Wilgar Park, £500,000
- iv. To note the Stage 3 process; and,
- v. To note the approach regarding feedback and support to those groups that are not progressing to Stage 3 – Delivery.

It was agreed also that a report on a review of the funding allocations be submitted to the Committee in March, 2025.

City Centre Regeneration Scheme

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for the targeted acquisition of a strategic property in Belfast city centre and provided an update on the Assembly Rooms.

The Committee:

- i. Agreed that a conditional offer be made to acquire the city centre property referenced in the report on the basis as outlined and, subject to the offer being accepted by the vendor, to acquire the property on terms to be agreed by the City Solicitor and the Director City Regeneration and Development; and noted that completion of any acquisition would be subject to title/legal due diligence.
- ii. Noted that, if the Council acquired the property, a further detailed report would be brought back on the future use proposals for the property.
- iii. Noted the update in relation to the Assembly Rooms and that a without prejudice /conditional offer for acquisition is being made to the owners based on a valuation undertaken by LPS.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

**Report - Response received from DfC
re Remote Meetings Regulations**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting held on 19th April, 2024, it had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities requesting that the Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2024 be brought forward as quickly as possible.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

The Committee was advised that a response had been received from Mr. Anthony Carleton, Director Local Government and Housing Regulation, Department for Communities.

In his response he advises *“the Minister is committed to bringing forward these regulations, within as short a timeframe as possible, using enabling powers in the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021.*

These regulations will be subject to the draft affirmative procedure in the Assembly which means that, once they are finalised and laid in the Assembly, a motion to approve them must be tabled, and considered in plenary session of the Assembly.

It is the intention of the Minister to have these regulations made, subject to Assembly approval, before the Assembly summer recess.”

Noted.

Governance

**Local Government Commissioner for
Standards Annual Report 2022/23**

The Committee noted the Local Government Commissioner for Standards Annual Report for 2022/23.

Member Development Proposed Changes June 2024

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present and seek approval of the proposed changes to the current approach to elected member development.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The committee is requested to:

- **Approve the implementation of the proposed changes as set out below at 3.4.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 The current approach to elected member development was developed by a ‘task and finish’ Elected Member Development Working Group and was agreed by the SP&R committee on 24 March 2017.

- 3.2 At its meeting on 22 September 2023, the committee agreed that the current approach should be reviewed via engagement with party group leaders. The Corporate HR team carried out a desk top review of the framework documents and presented the following proposed changes to Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum for further engagement and consideration within their parties.
- 3.3 In addition, all members were invited to attend a briefing on the changes on 24 April 2024.
- 3.4 Summary of proposed changes

The proposed changes to the Member Development process are summarised as follows:-

1. A new Elected Member Development Strategic Framework document bringing together all the processes involved.
2. Reformatted Members Role Profiles (content remains unchanged)
3. Reformatted Members Knowledge & Skills Framework now including a contents page and two new additional political skills to align with LGA/NILGA frameworks: Digital Technology and Resilience & Wellbeing
4. The revised Personal Development Planning (PDP) process proposes that carrying out a self-assessment against the Knowledge and Skills Framework and Role Profiles becomes a recommended element of the process, rather than mandatory element.
 - All members will now automatically be invited to a PDP meeting with Corporate HR to help encourage take up of the PDP process, with review meetings also scheduled on a regular basis once the PDP has been completed. Assistance from an external facilitator remains optional.
5. New PDP Template
 - Personal reflection section has been removed.
 - Now includes a summary of learning and development received to date (Corporate HR will pre-populate with any previous BCC learning and development activity)
 - Self-assessment is aligned directly to Knowledge & Skills Framework, descriptors have been removed to shorten document (asking members to refer to full

Framework and Role Profiles for full descriptor detail.)

6. Change to the Personal Member Development Budget

- Annual amount for the PDP budget to remain at £730 however going forward members will be able to access the full four years of PDP budget (£2920) at any time over the four year Council term - or part thereof. Members should note that if a member leaves the council and has used all or part of their 4 year budget, any co-opted member will only have access to the remaining allocation of the leaving member.
- It is proposed that degree type qualifications now be included as an option given that the full four-year budget allocation can be used at any time during the council term.

3.5 Further detail on the proposed changes is attached at Appendix 1.

Feedback from members on proposed changes

3.6 Members who provided feedback had no further comments or amendments and were happy with the proposals. The change to the budgeting process was particularly welcomed. Members also commented that these should be widely circulated to all Members to make them aware so that budgets could be used for development.

3.7 **Financial and Resource Implications**

To enable the full four-year Member Development PDP budgets of £2920 to be used at any time during the full council term, Corporate Finance will transfer any annual underspend to a specific reserve for the duration of the Council term. Members should note that budget allocations for 2023/24 not already used have been transferred, allowing members to avail of the full four budget now until the end of the council term.

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

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

The Committee approved the implementation of the proposed changes.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Draft Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25

The Director of Dity and Organisational Strategy submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the findings of the public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives and to present the draft Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2024-25 for Committee approval and publication.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. approve the draft Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2024-25 attached in Appendix 1 and authorise its publication on the council's website by the statutory deadline of 30 June 2024, subject to formal ratification by council on the 1 July 2024.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 Members will be aware that the council has a statutory duty to consult residents on proposed improvement objectives and to develop an annual PIP, which must be published by the 30 June each year. The PIP identifies the agreed improvement objectives for the year ahead and the actions to be undertaken to achieve them. The PIP doesn't represent everything that the council plans to do, but focuses on a set of key improvement objectives, as informed by the evidence base and consultation and engagement feedback.

3.2 The performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key themes and priorities identified within the new refresh of the Belfast Agenda and the emerging draft Corporate Plan. This provides a balanced approach to identifying improvement objectives that contribute to improving services, council functions and the quality of life for residents and communities. Members should also note that the council's strategic and collective partnership commitments to deliver shared city outcomes for the citizens of Belfast and the continuous improvement of internal organisational priorities will continue

to be delivered and enhanced as part of the Corporate Plan and the Belfast Agenda.

Consultation exercise and findings

- 3.3** In March, Members approved six draft improvement objectives, which were issued for public consultation. In April 2024, we commenced a public consultation process over an 8 - week period and received 92 responses, more than double the responses from last year. In assessing the findings of the consultation, it should be noted that:
- broad consensus across a majority of respondents supporting the improvement objectives.
 - the highest level of 89% was received from respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with 'Our people and communities' improvement objective based on supporting our residents to become healthier and engaged.
 - the lowest of level of 76% was received from respondents who strong agreed or agreed with 'Our economy' improvement objective based on helping business start-ups and growth and creating opportunities for more and better jobs and employment and encouraging inclusive growth.
- 3.4** In seeking feedback on other improvement suggestions for the consideration of council, 55 qualitative comments were received. Appendix 2 sets out a high-level assessment of the consultation findings including a recommended council response and action on how the proposed changes will be taken forward.
- 3.5** In response to feedback received in relation to the need to provide more detail to help clarify the intent behind some of the improvement objectives and how the actions outlined will help achieve improvement, minor changes to some of the objectives has been proposed. Some of the actions have also been realigned across the improvement objectives to provide greater clarity on how they will contribute to the intended area of improvement.
- 3.6** It should be noted that some of the feedback received in relation to possible additional improvement objectives and/or actions in the PIP, are set out below. Members will be aware that such areas are already being progressed through existing strategies, plans and structures including, for example, the Belfast Agenda 2024-28, the Belfast Local Development Plan and A Bolder Vision Strategy, including:

- Enhancing active travel infrastructure and opportunities to improve and enhance the cycling, walking and public transport infrastructure.
- Prioritising action on climate, including retrofitting existing buildings.
- Addressing city centre improvements and interventions such as vacancy rates and bringing forward a programme of interventions aimed at facilitating a clean, green, inclusive, and safe city centre delivered through a multi-agency group.
- Addressing key issues across the city such as homelessness and addiction support through delivery of the collaborative Complex Lives Model.

3.7 In discussing the consultation feedback with key officers across council, the following additional improvement actions have been included in the PIP:

- An improvement action to keep parks and open spaces clean and free from litter.
- Climate action such as the development of a sustainable food strategy.
- Promoting and educating young people on the reduce, reuse, and recycle message.
- A review of litter bins across the city and consideration of recommendations.

3.8 Draft Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25

Based on the consultation feedback and engagement with key council officers, the improvement objectives have been updated (see below) and incorporated within the draft PIP 2024-25, attached at Appendix 1.

Our services
We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.
Our people and communities
We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

Our place
We will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including the city centre).
Our planet
We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.
Our economy
We will stimulate inclusive growth and innovation, help businesses to start-up and grow and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment.
Compassionate city
We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.

3.9 Members are asked to approve the draft PIP 2024-25 in Appendix 1 and to authorise its publication on the council website by 28 June 2024. In order to meet our statutory deadline, the plan will be published subject to formal ratification by full council meeting on the 1 July 2024.

3.10 Financial and Resource Implications

The improvement plan has already been reflected in the formal planning and budgeting processes of council; there are no resource implications contained in this report.

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

There are no direct equality, good relations or rural needs implications of the PIP 2024-25.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

City Innovation update

The Committee considered the following report which had been submitted by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Members on City Innovation initiatives and to seek approval on a number of key projects developing over the next few months.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

1. Note Belfast City Council’s participation in the Ulster University’s ‘Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator’ bid to EPSRC, and to approve officer involvement in the design phase, (subject to a successful bid). And note that a further update on a successful bid would be presented in September.
2. To note the success of the Lord Mayor’s Innovation Twins mission to South Korea and to approve the issuing of an invitation to the mayor of Sejong to visit Belfast in May 2025.
3. Members are asked to approve acceptance of a further £50,000 from Connected Places Catapult to support work on the Innovation Twins programme including preparation for the Mayor’s visit through to March 2026.
4. To note Innovation City Belfast’s participation at the Smart Cities World Congress in November 2024. Members are asked to approve attendance by a small number of officers to support work on the Sejong Innovation Twins, ICB, engagement on City Deal opportunities, and the current Belfast 5G Innovation regions programme.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 The Smart Belfast urban innovation programme encourages collaboration on digital innovation projects between government, industry, SMEs, academia and communities. The aim is to harness innovation to address public policy challenges, while at the same time encouraging greater investment in innovation to stimulate economic growth. The following initiatives seek to contribute to both these aims:

3.2 (1) Belfast Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator

Ulster University and University College London have submitted a £2 million bid to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to establish a Belfast-based 'Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator' that will build capacity amongst the city's digital health tech companies by encouraging more collaboration with university researchers, clinicians and industry. The accelerator is also committed to a place-based approach that seeks to have positive health outcomes for local communities.

3.3 The Life and Health Science sector is important to the local economy, contributing 25% to the region's entire economic output. The sector grew by 75% between 2019 and 2022 and now has 170 companies employing over 20,000 people. It's a sector dominated by Innovation Driven Enterprises (IDEs) and is responsible for 75% of all of the region's university spin-out companies. The Accelerator aims to build on this success by meeting the innovation needs of these IDEs and spin-outs.

3.4 Members had previously approved an in-principle Council commitment to the programme in the form of in-kind staff time to the value of £100,000 over four years. There is also potential for Belfast Region City Deal partners to develop a complementary funding proposal to encourage the wider participation of start-ups and IDEs.

3.5 The Ulster University bid has now been shortlisted by EPSRC for final consideration, with a decision on funding expected by the end of June. Ulster have requested that an officer from the City Innovation team attend the final selection interview to support the application. This is scheduled for 18 June.

3.6 If the bid is successful design work on the programme is expected to commence from early July. With this timeline in mind, and assuming a successful bid, Members are asked to approve officer participation in this design work. An update will be then brought to Members in September on the final agreed programme and Belfast City Council's role.

3.7 (2) Belfast Sejong Innovation Twins programme

As part of the UK South Korea 'Innovation Twins' programme the Lord Mayor led a mission to Sejong in April. During the visit the mayors of both cities signed off/endorsed a roadmap to deliver a series of joint projects over the next few years. These initiatives include a Global Innovation Network that will

support SMEs from both cities to develop trade opportunities; a satellite-based 'Security in Space' project with Queen's University; a cyber-security event; a Net Zero accelerator project with the Belfast Climate Commission; an autonomous transport project with Belfast Harbour; and a 5G project with Ulster University and Digital Catapult. Invest NI are also supporting an inward investment mission by Sejong SMEs to Belfast in 2025. Partners from both cities also explored joint cultural opportunities. Senior officials from Sejong are visiting Belfast later in June to agree an approach with local cultural and tourism organisations including Titanic Belfast, Belfast Stories, the Ulster Museum and others, to take forward joint opportunities.

3.8 Following the visit, the Mayor of Sejong wrote to Belfast City Council explaining that he will be visiting the UK in May 2025 and has indicated that he and his team would like to visit Belfast as part of their visit and would welcome an invitation from Belfast's Lord Mayor.

3.9 Initial feedback on the Belfast missions from Connected Places Catapult, who have been facilitating the Innovation Twins programme on behalf of UK Government, has been extremely positive. The Belfast Sejong twinning is being highlighted to UK Government as exemplar for other cities in the programme to follow. Connected Places Catapult has also indicated that they wish to make a further £50,000 available to Belfast City Council and its partners to take forward work into 2025 including preparation for the inward visit of the Sejong Mayor and to support engagement work at this year's Smart Cities World Congress at which Sejong and South Korea are participating.

3.10 Members are asked to note the success of the April Mission to Sejong and to approve the issuing of an invitation to their mayor to visit Belfast in May 2025. Finally, Members are asked to approve acceptance of a further £50,000 from Connected Places Catapult to support the continuation of work on the programme through to March 2025.

3.11 (3) Barcelona Smart Cities World Congress

The Smart Cities Congress is an annual event that attracts 850 cities and over 1,100 digital companies. It is an opportunity for cities to promote their innovation ecosystem and build relationships with industry partners and investors in innovation.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- 3.12** Belfast has had a limited presence at the previous events, with individuals from Belfast City Council, the universities and Belfast Harbour attending. More recently Invest NI have taken a stand at the event to promote their client companies.
- 3.13** This year Innovation City Belfast (ICB) has been approached separately by both Invest NI and Connected Places Catapult to explore how Belfast partners can promote a shared story about the city's ambition, our City Deal Digital Innovation investments, the work of our universities, and the success of our innovative companies.
- 3.14** This year Connected Places Catapult have been commissioned by Government to host a pavilion that will accommodate up to 10 UK smart cities. The Catapult are organising a series of panel discussions, meeting spaces, shared collateral, and presentation opportunities for the participating cities. They are also keen to support opportunities for Belfast and Sejong (who are also attending as part of a large South Korean delegation) to present on the innovation twins work noted above to a wider audience. In addition, Sejong want to discuss with Belfast and other cities and industry partners joint opportunities associated with their 'Smart District 5.1' where \$4 billion will be invested over the next decade.
- 3.15** The Belfast presence will be led by Innovation City Belfast's new Innovation Commissioner who is expected to be in post by the time of the conference. The City Innovation Office has already secured a speaking slot for the Commissioner in the main Congress programme. The Commissioner has also received invites to participate in the Microsoft and Bloomberg's 'City Innovation Commissioners' programming at the event.
- 3.16** Members are asked note to ICB's planned attendance at the Smart Cities World Congress. Members are asked to approve attendance by a number of officers to support work on the Sejong Innovation Twins, ICB, engagement on City Deal opportunities, and the current Belfast 5G Innovation regions programme. Belfast City Council officer travel costs would be funded by the relevant project budgets.
- 3.17** **Financial and Resource Implications**

Budgets for the initiatives noted above are funded via third-party sources, with any Council contributions identified within the existing Council budgets. Officer travel for the Smart City World Congress will be sourced from the Innovation Twins and 5G IR engagement budgets.

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

None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2.0 of the report.

Hardship Programme Update

The Committee considered the following report which provided an update on the Hardship Programme 2023/24:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the implementation of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme, which seeks to help alleviate the impact of poverty and the cost-of-living on vulnerable people across the city, and to provide an update on the budget position for a 2024/25 programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. note the contents of this report including the update on the implementation and impact of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme;**
- ii. consider the current budget position in relation to the development and delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25, which seeks to support those most impacted by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis; and**
- iii. consider and agree the proposed funding framework to be adopted to support the implementation of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25 (subject to the availability of funding).**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Members will be aware that the Council agreed, at its meeting in December 2023, the implementation of a £1,018,790 hardship scheme for the 2023/2024 financial year. The programme was funded through £724,600 provided by the Department for Communities, and £294,190 from Covid Support Grant underspends.

- 3.2 Members agreed that the hardship scheme would provide support and assistance to a range of cohorts including children and families, vulnerable individuals and families in emergency need and to enhancing the capacity of existing and high-impact support programmes. The design of the programme was based on the lessons learnt from previous schemes as well as discussions with the Members' Cost of Living Working Group and service providers in relation to potential areas of greatest need and impact from any such funding.

Implementing 2023/24 Hardship Programme

- 3.3 The delivery of the hardship programme ended on 31 March 2024. Appendix 1 provides a high-level progress update and what has been achieved through the intensive work by our delivery partners. It should be noted that the delivery partners attended and presented to a recent meeting of the Members' Cost-of-Living Working Group to provide members with an insight into the demand for and impact of the funding. A copy of the slide-deck is attached at Appendix 2 for information. In summary, key delivery highlights include:

- 121 schools supported across the city have designed projects to support children through food projects, help with uniform/stationary costs or period poverty initiatives, with over 21,000 children supported (28 schools still to provide returns – so this number will increase)
- 23 community day care providers delivered 16,042 hot nutritious meals to 1,187 children
- Save the Children provided support to 913 individuals through their early years grants programme
- Family support hubs have supported 1,271 families
- St. Vincent de Paul have supported 3,398 people in emergency need
- Trussell Trust have supported 4,514 people through 3 food banks
- Fareshare have distributed over 37 tonnes of food to their network of community food banks
- NEA have supported 625 households through the Warm & Well programme
- Age NI supported 445 older people with fuel vouchers
- Package of programmes for children & young people, older people and families have been delivered across the 26 council community centres.
- Seven independent community facilities have received funding to deliver programmes.
- 21 social supermarkets have supported over 3157 individuals as a result of the Hardship Programme

investment. (Almost 10,885 supported through the total Social Supermarket Fund).

Feedback received from delivery partners on lessons learnt

- 3.4 A key area of feedback received from partners related to the pressure on funding having to be spent in-year (2023-2024) and the fact that the commitment and release of funding was late in the year. This effectively meant that delivery had to take place at pace over a three-month period from January to March. This operating environment is difficult and creates pressure on officers and partners throughout programme design, delivery & monitoring stages. Partners highlighted that the level of demand for support was unprecedented and has become an all-year-round challenge for many families. Whilst recognising the budgetary pressures faced by the Council, delivery partners did highlight the need for councils and central government to consider annual recurring funding going forward and how that this would enhance their ability to plan and deliver more positive outcomes for people.
- 3.5 Another key area highlighted by delivery partners was the usefulness and impact of the cost-of-living support guide prepared by Council and distributed widely across the city. This helped enhance people's awareness and understanding of the types of support available across the city and to improve referral and signposting processes.
- 3.6 Members will note that a Market-Place event has been scheduled in City Hall in October 2024, It's purpose will be to recognise the impact of the hardship programme, what support has been delivered across the city as well as providing an opportunity for members of the public and delivery organisations to learn about available services and support. This event will also explore the potential to establish a stakeholder network of organisations that are working to help address poverty and cost-of-living issues through relevant services.

Budget Position for 2024/25 Hardship Programme:

- 3.7 As outlined earlier in the report, the 2023/24 Hardship Programme was funded through £724,600 provided by the Department for Communities, and £294,190 from Covid Support Grant underspends. The previous year (2022/23) the Fuel Poverty Hardship Programme was funded through £1.1m of Council funding.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- 3.8 At present, there is no certainty around funding from the Department for Communities and there is no Council allocation towards a 2024/25 Hardship Programme. While some underspend from previous years is available, the impact of this would be much less than in previous years unless additional funding can be secured.
- 3.9 Members may recall that at the April committee meeting SP&R agreed to provide £122,627 to fund 21 Social Supermarket Projects in the absence of a Letter of Offer from DfC to fund this area of work. In previous years DfC has provided significant funding to support social supermarkets, approximately £415,000 in 23/24. The current position is outlined in the table below.

Current available Hardship Programme 24/25 budget (from identified underspends)	£223,400*
Commitment to provide 25% funding to 21 Social Supermarket Projects (April SP&R)	£122,627
Current Balance for Hardship Programme	£100,773

Strategic approach to future commissioning of hardship support

- 3.10 Based on feedback from delivery partners and in order to ensure that the Council can move at pace when Hardship Funding becomes available Members are asked to consider and agree to the development of a procurement framework, which will allow funding to be distributed at pace to organisations with experience & capacity and provide the Council with assurance in relation to Audit, Governance & Risk.

Development of Funding Framework for 2024/25 Programme:

- 3.11 Based on constructive and positive discussions at the Cost-of-Living Task Group meetings, as well as learning from delivery partners Committee is asked to agree the following approach towards the delivery of the 2024/25 Hardship Programme (subject to the availability of funding):

i. Thematic focus of support

The Hardship Scheme will seek to support those most vulnerable affected by the cost-of-living crisis with a key focus

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

on enhancing the capacity of existing organisations across the following themes:

- Support to children and young people and families;
- Support to individuals/families in emergency need; and
- Support for older people.

ii. Design principles

The Members' Cost of Living Working Group agreed that the following guiding principles to inform and help shape the design of the emerging Hardship Fund.

- Dignity - delivered in a way that maintains the dignity of the person accessing support.
- Needs driven - targeted at those most in need and can demonstrate this.
- Wraparound – any individual accessing emergency support should be offered access to other wraparound services to help address need on an ongoing basis.
- Promote sustainability – not displace/ duplicate but add value to what is already in existence.
- Delivery Infrastructure - proper infrastructure (internally within BCC and externally within other organisations) is in place to support the delivery of support.

Suggested Next Steps

3.12 Members are asked to consider the next steps in taking forward a Hardship Programme for 2024/25:

Task	Target Date
Update SP&R on delivery of 2023/24 Programme and seek views on budget position for 2024/25	June 2024
Develop a funding framework based on Members feedback	July/August 2024
Seek feedback from the Cost of Living Task Group	September 2024

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

Task	Target Date
Seek ratification on approach from SP&R	September 2024
Market Place event to enhance signposting and referral processes across the city	October 2024
Establish delivery mechanisms	October 2024
Design & Distribute Cost-of-living Support Guide	October 2024
Delivery of Hardship Programme 2024/25	November 2024 – March 2025

Financial and Resource Implications

3.13

- There is currently £223,400 allocated identified from underspends for a Hardship Programme in 2024/25. However, there is a Commitment to provide 25% funding to 21 Social Supermarket Projects (April SP&R), which will potentially use £122,627
- This would leave £100,773 for the delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25
- Given the fact that no Letter of Offer from DFC for Social Supermarkets has been received it is difficult to accurately plan the financial allocation for delivery of a Hardship Programme 24/25.

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

- 3.14** An Equality Screening and Rural Needs Assessment was undertaken for the delivery of the 2023/24 programme. This will also be the case for the delivery of any Hardship Programme for 2024/25.”

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

The Committee:

- i) noted the contents of the report, including the update on the implementation and impact of the 2023/24 Hardship Programme;
- ii) noted the current budget position in relation to the development and delivery of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25, which sought to support those most impacted by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis;
- iii) agreed the proposed funding framework to be adopted to support the implementation of a Hardship Programme in 2024/25 (subject to the availability of funding);
- iv) agreed that a report on the recent discussions with DfC, and any pending letter of offer, regarding 2024/25 funding for Social Supermarkets, be submitted to the special meeting to be held on 28th June; and
- v) noted that future consideration would be given to possible funding opportunities for the Hardship Programme aligned to in-year budget position discussions within Committee.

Apprenticeship Report

The Committee was reminded that initial proposals on an apprenticeship programme had been presented for its consideration in February and it was agreed that a further report be submitted detailing how the proposals could be financed. Subsequently, at its meeting in March 2024, the Committee approved funding for two apprentices 2024/25 from realignment of specified reserves, with the costs for future years to be incorporated into the medium-term financial plan.

Two apprenticeship opportunities had been approved: one in Fleet Services and one in Digital Services. The report detailed approximate salary and training costs for the two posts of £77,000 per full year (around £45,000 for 24/25 by the time the posts are recruited).

The proposed costings were based on a higher-level Digital Services apprenticeship (level 4 – 7). Having had detailed engagement with Belfast Met, the Head of Digital Services has determined that a Level 3 apprenticeship better meets the needs of the service. Accordingly, the revised indicative salary costs are set out below, which shows the reduction in annual salary costs of around £10,000.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

Skill area	Level required	Approximate BCC Salary Grade	Approximate Annual Salary Costs per apprentice	Approximate Annual Training costs per apprentice
Fleet Technician	Apprentice level 2 or 3	Scale 2	£30,000	£2,000
Digital services	Apprentice level 3	Scale 2	£30,000	£5,000
			Total indicative costs per annum	£67,000

Following further discussion with City and Neighbourhood Services, the department had advised that, based on previous experience, recruiting 2 apprentices to work alongside each other, increases learning and the support provided by a “buddy” to each other, and can also increase the chances of an apprentice completing the training programme. Peer support for the Digital Services apprenticeship will be provided by the service’s two industrial placement students.

The revised annual cost of 2 Fleet Technician and one Digital Service’s apprentice was approximately £99,000, that was around £61,000 for the 2024/25 financial year. The Director of Finance had confirmed that an additional cost of £16,000 could be funded from, firstly, in year underspends, if available, or re-alignment of specified reserves. As proposed previously, costs for future years would be incorporated into the medium-term financial plan. Therefore, the Committee was being asked to approve the recruitment of an additional Fleet Technician apprentice.

The Committee noted the update provided and approved a third apprenticeship opportunity.

Diversity Summit Sponsorship

The Committee considered a report which sought approval to sponsor the Diversity Mark Summit 2024 which was taking place at Titanic Belfast on 8th October, 2024.

The Council was one of the founding signatory organisations to the Gender Diversity Charter in 2017. Now known as “Diversity Mark”, this membership organisation provides support to employers to make and demonstrate progressive improvement in creating an inclusive and diverse workplace. The Council currently holds Silver Accreditation and works closely with Diversity Mark on a number of initiatives and forums aimed at sharing and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion best practice.

The Committee agreed to provide sponsorship in the sum of £2000 which would be met from the existing Organisational Development budget.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report includes a review of recently completed and underway physical projects, along with requests for approvals relating to the Capital Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Physical Programme Half Year Update - note the overall update on projects that have been completed recently and projects currently under construction at 3.1 to 3.5 below and in Appendix 1; and that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.**
- **RICS Awards – note that two Council projects recently won prestigious NI RICS Awards in the Heritage category for Templemore Baths and also for St. Comgall’s in the Refurbishment category and will now go on to compete in the National Finals in London in October. Approval is sought for the Chair of the SP&R Committee or their nominee along with a senior officer to attend the awards in October.**
- **Capital Programme –**
 - **HWRCs & Civic Amenity Sites – Containers (Skips and Compactors) – Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of £675,000 be allocated.**
 - **IT Programme – C&NS Case Management Solution – Agree that the project is moved to Stage 3 –**

Committed and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Physical Programme Half Year Update

Members are aware of the scale of the Council’s Physical Programme via a range of internal and external funding streams. Members are advised that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway. Below is a brief summary of projects completed since February, as well as a sample of projects currently underway.

3.2 Awards and recognition

Two of the Council’s recently completed capital projects have been successful at the prestigious Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Awards held on 21 May – winning in the Heritage category for Templemore Baths and also for St. Comgall’s in the Refurbishment category. The awards recognise and celebrate the most inspirational initiatives and developments across the UK and the projects are going forward as finalists for October’s national awards. Approval is sought for the Chair of the SP&R Committee or their nominee along with a senior officer to attend the awards in October.

In addition, the VOYPIC project delivered by the Council was shortlisted in the Refurbishment category. Templemore Baths and St Joseph’s Church Sailortown were also shortlisted in the Heritage Angel Awards organised by Ulster Architectural Heritage.

3.3 Recently completed projects:

- City Hall Statues – Winifred Carney and Mary Ann McCracken – sculptures of both women have been installed in the grounds of Belfast City Hall. Mary Ann McCracken was an abolitionist, social reformer and

activist who fought for the rights of women and championed Belfast's poor, and Winifred Carney was a suffragist, trade unionist and Irish independence activist. The unveilings took place on International Women's Day in March.

- Pitt Park – the £1.7 million redevelopment of Dr Pitt Memorial Park is now complete, funded by Urban Villages. The park has created an attractive, safe and accessible area where families, children, and people of all ages can get active, have fun and enjoy the rich heritage of the area.
- Paisley Park Sportsplex – the improvement project is now complete and included the installation of the 3G pitch, floodlighting and also new changing facilities. Funded by DfC.
- Belfast Bikes Expansion – new bike stations are now installed at Sandown Road, Drumglass and Glencairn.
- Playground Improvement Programme – improvements are now complete at Loughside Park and Northlink playgrounds.
- Bredagh GAC (BIF) – completion of refurbishment of the club's premises to provide a multi-purpose hall, meeting and IT rooms, kitchen facilities, installation of a new lift, new roof and external improvements.
- Greater Shankill Community Council (BIF and SOF) – completion of refurbishment of the building including installation of accessible door, lift to all floors, and new shop frontage.
- LORAG (LIF) – community garden project is complete (see also below for Lockhouse);
- Somme Cross-Community Memorial (LIF) – completion of environmental improvements at the Garden of Remembrance including installation of a Cairn stone monument;
- Tullycarnet Outdoor Gym (LIF) – project completed.
- Holylands Area Improvement Initiatives (LIF) – completion of environmental improvements which included tree planting.
- Musgrave Car Park – completion of environmental improvements to car park including asphalt surfacing and line marking.

3.4 Physical projects underway:

- Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF): a total of 16 significant scale projects have now progressed to Stage 3 – Delivery stage under the £10m+ NRF Programme. Procurements are well underway for the majority of schemes dependent on the requirements of

each scheme. Officer support remains in place for projects at Stage 2.

- Ballysillan Playing Fields -this is a £7.5m partnership project with DfI's Living with Water Programme, DfC and Urban Villages. Design and engagement stages have been carried out and Planning permission has been secured. It is anticipated that the contractor will be on site in Autumn.
- Lagan Gateway Greenway Phase 2 – work continues on the next stages of this major investment of £5m in a new navigation lock, iconic foot and cycle bridge and new path connections.
- The Lockhouse - this £2.7m partnership project will reimagine a historic and culturally important residential building along the Lagan towpath into a community focal point for good relations activity and cross-community partnership working including minority ethnic communities. Remaining elements funded by DfC, DfI and Urban Villages. Works underway on site.
- ABC Trust Health and Leisure Hub – Phase 2 of the project is continuing on site comprising a community café, boxing club, minor halls, community gym and office space. Part of the Urban Villages Initiative.
- Playground Improvement Programme – New Lodge playground is due to be completed in June.
- LIF and BIF - a total of 2 projects on site under the BIF Programme, 18 completed to date; and a total of 5 projects are on the ground under the LIF Programme, 127 projects completed to date.
- Corporate projects – a range of capital IT projects via Digital Services to ensure business continuity including the completion of the e5 Financial Replacement System; and ongoing delivery of Fleet Replacement Programme via City & Neighbourhoods Services.

3.5 Physical projects in development:

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

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

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

- **A range of other schemes including the remaining LIF, BIF and SOF projects.**

3.6 Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities.

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

Project	Overview	Stage movement
HWRC & CAS Containers	The project involves the replacement of containers (compactors and skips) at HWRCs and Civic Amenity sites in order to maintain service continuity and health & safety standards.	Stage 3 – Committed: Proceed to contractor appointment with a maximum budget of £675,000
IT Programme – C&NS Case Management Solution	This project will replace the existing IT system (APP) for the regulatory management functions, to ensure procurement, legal and GDPR compliance.	Move to Stage 3 - Committed

3.8 HWRCs & Civic Amenity Sites - Containers

Members will be aware that the Containers (Skips and Compactors) project was approved at SP&R Committee in October 2023 to move to *Stage 3 - Committed* project on the Capital Programme. Members agreed that the necessary procurement processes be initiated as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has now been achieved and it is recommended that a maximum of £675,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director

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

3.9 IT Programme – C&NS Case Management Solution

This project is part of the overall IT Programme and will replace the existing IT system (the Authority Public Protection software case management system or APP) for the regulatory management functions, to ensure procurement, legal and GDPR compliance. The current system has been in place since 2005. The new system will be a single modern and intuitive system designed to embed mobile technology and digitally transform how CNS plan, manage and monitor service delivery across core units. Members are asked to recommend that the IT Programme - C&NS Case Management Solution project now progresses to *Stage 3 – Committed* and that it is held at *Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk* pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return. An update will be brought back to Committee at this stage along with the final budget allocation and confirmation that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are asked to agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.10 Financial & Resource Implications

Financial – Capital Programme - HWRCs & Civic Amenity Sites – Containers – a maximum of £675,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resources – Officer time to deliver as required

3.11 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2.0 of the report.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

Assets Management

The Committee:

i) Land at Orchardville Crescent – Disposal

approved the disposal of lands at the rear of houses 20 to 56 Orchardville Crescent to the adjoining homeowners.

ii) Land at Ladybrook Park – Disposal

approved the disposal of lands at the rear of houses 26 to 40 Ladybrook Park to the adjoining homeowners.

iii) Retail Unit at Belfast Castle – New Lease

approved a new 6-year lease of the vacant basement level retail unit.

iv) Benview Community Centre – New Licence

approved a new 1-year licence agreement for the use of a portion of Benview Community Centre as a play centre and for use of storage container.

v) Cregagh Youth and Community Centre – New Licence

approved a new licence to Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) for their occasional use of the overflow parking area adjacent to Cregagh Youth and Community Centre.

vi) Cliftonville Playing Fields – Disposal of land to rear of 13 Glenard Brook

approved the assignment of BCC's long leasehold interest in a portion of land that has been encroached on to the rear of 13 Glenard Brook.

vii) North Foreshore – Financial Provisions

noted that the Council would enter into a performance deed with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to document revised financial provisions required under North Foreshore Waste Management Licence.

viii) North Foreshore – Licence to Occupy

approved the Council entering into a licence to occupy with Renewable Power Systems and Dargan Road Biogas Limited.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

ix) Brook Leisure Centre – Licence Agreement

approved a licence agreement with Colin Gaels Gaelic Athletic Club to install and position a storage container at Brook Leisure Centre.

Area Working Groups Update

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the West AWG - 22 May, North AWG - 28 May, West AWG (special) - 5 June, East AWG of 6 June and South AWG (special) - 10 June 2024, including the following:

Members of the West AWG agreed to recommend the following allocations for the additional £93,878 for West Belfast under NRF:

- £37,058 to Michael Davitt's GAC - Michael Davitt's Community Heritage Centre
- £37,058 to Glór na Móna - Croí na Carraige - 'The Heart of the Rock' Phase 1; and;
- £19,762 (Shankill) to be retained as a contingency for the Shankill projects.

#In considering the minutes of the South Area Working Group of 20th May, it was

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor RM Donnelly,

That the minutes be approved and adopted, subject to the amendment of the minute under the heading Physical Programme Update to provide that the additional Neighbourhood Regeneration Funding of £53,893 be allocated to the Solas New Build Project.

On a recorded vote, ten Members voted for the proposal and four against and it was declared carried:

For 10	Against 4
Councillors Murphy, Beattie, Black, Bunting, Cobain, RM Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett and R McLaughlin.	Councillors Groogan, Maghie, Nelson and Whyte.

Update on Sporting Pitches Investment

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reminded the Members that work was ongoing to progress the Belfast Pitches Strategy. A report outlining the background to the need for development of the Strategy, an indicative timeline for commissioning and an overview of the Terms of Reference had been presented to People

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

and Communities Committee in August 2023. It was expected that a draft strategy would be presented to Committee in March 2025.

As part of that work and in the interim period of producing the Pitches Strategy, officers were committed to continuing to work on an area-by-area basis to identify, agree and secure quick wins at our existing sites.

Following confirmation of a recurring budget of £500,000 for pitch improvements, officers had identified the following facilities and associated works for immediate progression in the 24/25 financial year:

- **North - Mallusk Playing Fields**

The creation of an additional two full-size GAA pitches to include all relevant GAA posts, ball stops, nets and including the conversion of a shale area to grass. This would create a total of four full size GAA pitches at that site. A planning application had been submitted and it was expected that this work would be completed by February 2025;

- **East - Henry Jones Playing Fields**

Work was underway to install ball stops and spectator fencing at this GAA pitch. A planning application had been submitted and work was expected to be completed by February 2025;

- **West - Falls Park**

Installation of ball stop netting for the GAA pitch. Recommended for approval by planning on 18th June with work expected to be completed by September 2024;

- **South - Strangford Ave Playing Fields**

Work was underway to convert one full-size soccer pitch into three small-sized soccer pitches and to reinstate a second disused full-size soccer pitch. This would maximise soccer provision at this site and cater for the displacement of SBYL soccer from Mallusk Playing Fields. This work would be completed by September 2024.

Further scoping work was underway at all existing sites to create a stand-by list of ready to go projects as and when budget becomes available. Further details would be brought to committee in due course.

In addition to these infrastructure improvements at Council facilities, officers were also working to identify partnership opportunities to secure community access to facilities owned by the Education Authority or by other sporting clubs. Work was ongoing in this regard, with a number of exploratory conversations and site visits underway.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

As part of that work, an opportunity to secure the continued use of Ashfield Boys' High School as an intermediate soccer pitch for St Matthew's FC had arisen at a cost of £30,000 per annum. The Committee was therefore asked to consider this funding request which would be met from the pitches budget.

The Committee noted the update on improvements to pitches across the city, granted approval of £30,000 to be met from the pitches budget to secure the use of Ashfield Boys' High School as an intermediate soccer pitch for continued use by St Matthew's Football Club; and noted also that this would be for a one-year period pending the development of the pitches strategy.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

**Audit and Risk Panel Annual Report to
Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
including Draft Annual Governance Statement**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The Audit and Risk Panel is constituted as a working group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The purpose of the Panel is to provide an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. The Panel also oversees the Council's financial reporting process.

1.2 The purpose of this report is twofold:

- To provide a summary to Committee of the key issues that have been considered and discussed by the Panel during the 2023/24 financial year, the assurances received and the areas requiring attention.**
- To present the Annual Governance Statement for 23/24 for consideration and inclusion in the unaudited statement of accounts which will be certified by the Chief Finance Officer by 30th June 2024 and then subject to NIAO audit. The Statement has been considered by the Audit and Risk Panel and must be approved by the Chair of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Chief Executive.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the summary of the work of the Panel during 2023/24 as set out at Section 3.**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- Review and approve the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 at Appendix A and, in particular, the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement.
- Note the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 4 June 2024 at Appendix B.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel in 2023/24

3.1 In March 2023 the Panel approved the internal audit strategy and plan for the 2023/24 year. The plan was designed to allow AGRS to provide independent assurance over the following areas:

- Key financial systems / income generating activity
- Key programmes / projects
- Corporate priorities
- Management of key corporate risks
- Meeting external grant funding requirements
- Governance arrangements

3.2 During 2023/24, the Panel met four times on a hybrid basis. At these meetings the Panel considered progress reports on delivery of audit plan and issues arising from audit activity, including the findings, assurance levels and recommendations arising from audit work and the progress being made to implement audit recommendations. It also received regular updates on:

- the Council's financial position, as set out in its financial statements
- reports from the Council's external auditors
- risk management
- business continuity
- fraud, financial irregularity and whistleblowing / raising concerns investigations
- governance related matters
- financial control
- health and safety
- performance management
- staff attendance.

- 3.3 The key assurances that the Panel received are as follows:**
- **the Council's financial statements and annual governance statement, as prepared by the Director of Finance and their team; this provided a management assurance on the Council's financial position**
 - **the audited accounts and the associated external audit annual letters for 2022/23 (providing an opinion on the accounts) and report to those charged with governance (setting out control issues arising from the annual external audit), as prepared and presented by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. This provided an external assurance on the Council's financial position for 2022/23. (The accounts for 2023/24 are to be prepared by the end of June 2024)**
 - **the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance arrangements, based on the findings of audit work completed throughout the year.**
- 3.4 The Panel received assurance from the NIAO regarding their performance improvement audit and assessment for the Council which resulted in a standard, unqualified opinion regarding how the Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties.**
- 3.5 In terms of the improvement assessment the Panel learned that the LGA had provided an opinion, that the Council is unlikely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2023-24 as it has not been able to demonstrate a track record of improvement. Regarding this matter, the Panel received a report from management on the next steps for the indicators used in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, with Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreeing for the Performance Improvement Plan for 2023-24 to be updated and re-published. The Panel also received regular reports on the Performance Improvement activities.**
- 3.6 Where areas for improvement have been identified, these have been reported and implementation of agreed recommendations is actively monitored and reported back to the Panel. The Panel has, on occasions, raised issues where either audit reports have identified significant issues or progress against recommendations has not been satisfactory, with Directors asked, where necessary, to attend the Panel and provide further explanation. The key areas considered during 2023/24 include:**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- internal audits of key areas such as the Belfast Agenda, Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, Budgetary Control and Financial Reporting, Fuel Procedures, Labour Market Partnership, Police and Community Safety Partnerships, Social Value Procurement Policy, Payroll Data Analytics, Cyber Security – Computer Use Policy, Data Migration Process for the new Accounting System, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd and Visit Belfast.
 - audits of the management of corporate risks such as Port Health, People Strategy, Customer Focus, Climate Change and Resilience Strategy.
 - assurance and advisory work over key programmes including the project to replace the Accounting System, the Belfast Region City Deal programme, the new HR system and the In-Cab Technology project .
- 3.7 The Audit and Risk Panel have also received updates during the year on the Council’s risk management arrangements, including reports on the management of the Council’s key corporate risks.

Compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement

- 3.8 The CIPFA publication ‘Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police’ dated October 2022 sets out guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and represents best practice
- 3.9 In line with the guidance the Panel considered the evaluation of its impact and effectiveness and also the assessment against best practice in March 2024, following their training session in January 2024. This evaluation found the Panel to be compliant with the CIPFA position statement with one minor exception regarding how the Panel is appointed. Council policy is based on nomination of one member from each of the main political parties with an external member to provide independence and expertise, rather than on members skills.

Annual Governance Statement

- 3.10 At their meeting on 4 June 2024, the Panel considered the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2023/24 and, in particular, the significant governance issues contained in the statement.
- 3.11 The Annual Governance Statement is an important document, and it is important that the Committee is fully aware of its contents. The disclosures in the statement are based upon the

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

Council's corporate risk register and take into consideration the disclosures made by Chief Officers in their individual annual assurance statements. The Annual Governance Statement also incorporates a summary of the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement.

Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel meeting on 4 June 2024

3.12 In line with usual protocol, the minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel meeting are presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

3.13 Financial and Resource Implications

None

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

None.”

The Committee:

- Noted the summary of the work of the Panel during 2023/24 as set out at Section 3 of the report.
- Approved the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 at Appendix A and, in particular, the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement.
- Approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 4 June 2024 at Appendix B.
- Agreed that a report be submitted to the August meeting on the compliance rates for the processing time for both major and local Planning Applications.

Tri-Cities Golf Event

The Committee was advised that the Council had, since 2002, participated in the Tri-Cities Golf Event between Belfast, Dublin and Edinburgh. The event rotated around each of the three cities on an annual basis, with the 2024 event set to take place in Belfast.

The Tri-Cities Golf Event originated from a city network named “Cities of the Isles”. The Golf Event was developed to establish strong social capital networks across the cities alongside opportunities for networking, collaboration and engagement on a range of shared challenges.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

The golf competition was between representatives of each Council's Senior Management Teams, or their deputies, and elected members from each of the city councils. The teams all travel at their own expense and meet their own accommodation costs. No subsequent allowance or expenses of any kind are paid to any of the participants. Each year the host city meets the costs of the green fees for the visitors and a meal in the clubhouse after the match. The anticipated costs of hosting the event were approximately £4,500 provided from existing revenue budgets.

The event dates are 5th – 6th September, with the first day of the tournament taking place at Belvoir Park Golf Club and the second at Dunmurry Golf Club.

The Committee agreed to host the event to include Hospitality by the Lord Mayor.

Contracts

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1);
- approved the award of Single Tender Actions in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2);
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3); and
- approved Contracts awarded by Arc 21 on behalf of the Council (Table 3):

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Procurement of a contractor to provide tours and operate the visitor centre in City Cemetery	Up to 3 years	£195,000	S Toland	To fulfil objectives and outcomes set by the Heritage funded restoration project for City Cemetery
Commvault Cloud Backup & Recovery for Microsoft 365 Enterprise	Up to 3 years	£90,000	P Gribben	To provide backup and recovery capabilities for the council's Microsoft 365 data
Provision of colourful floats, professional performers, costume hire and design, musicians and community engagement	Up to 3 years	£285,000	J Greer	To successfully curate and deliver the 2025 St Patrick's Day parade in

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

workshops in the St Patrick's Day Parade 2025				Belfast with option to extend the contract up to a further 2 years if 2025 proves successful.
Provision of a city centre music festival / programme over the St Patrick's Celebrations period.	Up to 3 years	£270,000	J Greer	There is a requirement of a city centre music festival / programme over the St Patrick's Celebrations period 2025 to increase dwell time during the festivities beyond the Parade element. Option to extend up to a further 2 years if 2025 proves successful.

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason Code
Art of Reconciliation for Belfast 2024	Up to 4 months	£50,000	J Greer	BCC is delivering a number of direct commissions that align key strategic objectives and programme delivery. Féile an Phobail, in partnership with Belfast International Arts Festival and East Side Arts presents an International story of art and reconciliation, exploring locally international	Feile an Phobail	2

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

				experiences of the transformative role of the arts in dealing with complex issues around legacy, conflict and reconciliation.		
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Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Duration	Modification	SRO	Description	Supplier
T1939 - Routine inspection, maintenance and repairs of roll-on/roll-off containers and static compactors Lot 1 - Inspection, Repair and Maintenance of Roll-on/Roll-off Containers Lot 2 – Inspection, Repair and Maintenance of Static Compactors	Up to 4 years	Additional 4 month and £30,000	D Sales	Currently finalising a procurement for the purchase of new skips and compactors and the outcome of that procurement will have an impact on the specification and requirements for this tender process depending on the type of equipment that is purchased.	Lot 1 - MacNabb Bros Waste Management Lot 2 - Benagh Engineering and Motor Works Ltd

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

Title of Contract	Duration	Estimated Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
Receipt, Processing, Treatment, Recycling and Disposal of Street Sweepings Waste: Lot 1	Up to 7 years	£2.03m (est. if full 7 years was utilised)	D Sales	Contract for the acceptance and processing of street sweeping waste. The contract includes obligations to recycle waste and to report key	Contract managed by arc 21

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

				performance information and details of all final destinations for the outputs after processing.	
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STA/ Direct Award Reasons

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

Funding requests

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of two requests for support as follows:

- 1. A request from the Belfast Hills Partnership for an increase in the level of funding support from Council**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

- 2. A request for support for the provision of toilet facilities at Fullerton Park on 12th July from the County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Committee is asked to consider the requests as detailed below.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Belfast Hills Partnership

Members may be aware that a report was presented to the June 2024 meeting of People and Communities Committee outlining a request for additional funding support from Belfast Hills Partnership (attached at Appendix 1). Given the associated financial implications, it was agreed that the request would be presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for decision.

- 3.2 Since its inception in 2005, Belfast City Council has been a key partner within the Belfast Hills Partnership. This funding has enabled the organisation to grow and develop from a small team of three individuals to today's team which consists of 6 full time members of staff and 9 part time staff bodies which allows the partnership to deliver a wide range of programmes within the Belfast City Council area including:**

- **Habitat & species surveys & improvements**
- **Environment education for young people**
- **Volunteering opportunities**
- **Addressing anti-social behaviour including fly tipping and wildfires**
- **Tree propagation & planting**
- **Community support & engagement**
- **Information provision**
- **Health walks**

- 3.3 The April 2011 meeting of the former Parks and Leisure Committee approved an annual funding allocation to the Belfast Hills Partnership of £36,900 which has since been included in revenue budgets.**

- 3.4 The Belfast Hills Partnership have highlighted consistent rising costs, which they advise they have tried to absorb internally by seeking to cut costs where possible – however, they are now in a position of seeking support from funding partners to continue delivering their services. Whilst NIEA have confirmed that they will increase their funding to BHP by**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

37%, the Partnership is approaching their Council partners to seek additional funding.

- 3.5 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council have confirmed that they have agreed an increase of 30% on current funding. It should be noted that each council provides funding in proportion to the land area owned by each Council within the Belfast Hill's Area and this arrangement will continue with these latest funding revisions.
- 3.6 The Belfast Hills Partnership currently receives £36,900 from Belfast City Council and have requested an increase of 30% (£11,070) to £47,970.

Request from Co Antrim Grand Orange Lodge

- 3.7 A request has been received from the County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge for support in providing portable toilets at Fullerton Park at the annual Twelfth of July event. Following discussion at the Party Leaders' Consultative Forum meeting held on 13 June 2024, it was agreed that the request would be presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for decision.
- 3.8 Committee are asked to consider providing £1,656 to the County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge to provide toilets for this event.

3.9 **Financial & Resource Implications**

Belfast Hills Partnership

Belfast Hills Partnership are requesting an additional £11,070 alongside the current allocation of £36,900.

Members should note that if Committee is minded to approve this request, that monies would be considered from in-year underspends, with the increase for future years to be considered as a growth proposal.

County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge

- 3.10 The County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge have requested £1,656 for provision of portable toilets. If Committee is minded to approve this request, funds will be met from within existing departmental budgets.

3.11 Equality Impact/Rural Needs Assessment

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

Belfast Hills Partnership

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the request in order to allow officers to check if the organisation was able to make an application under the discretionary funding.

County Grand Orange Lodge

The Committee approved the funding of £1,656 for the provision of portable toilets.

Equality and Good Relations

Shared City Partnership

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 10th June 2024, including:

Presentation from Forward South Partnership – Roma Hub and Feasibility Study - for notation

- Copy of the presentation is included in Appendix 2 for members information.

Good Relations Verbal Update

- The Good Relations Manager advised that officers were still not in receipt of a Letter of Offer from The Executive Office, also the Good Relations Manager informed members that Mears and the Home Office would not agree to present to SCP. The Good Relation Manager suggested a meeting be convened with himself, the Director and relevant Senior Officials in The Executive Office. Members agreed this approach.

Shared City Partnership – Terms of Reference

- The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee the updated Terms of Reference for the Shared City Partnership.

PEACEPLUS – Theme 1.1 - Local Action Plan Update

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

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

**Consultation on Equality Impact
Assessment of the Department
for Communities Budget Allocation**

The Committee noted that a draft response would be submitted to the August meeting.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of the Party Group Leaders
Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 13th June.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
British Heart Foundation NI	17 September 2024	British Heart Foundation NI Supporters' Day to acknowledge supporters of BHF and update them in future plans. Numbers attending – 100	C & D	Current rate free as charity	No hospitality
Northern Ireland Tenpin Bowling Federation	22 September 2024	Adult Triple Crown Presentation Evening - Drinks Reception, Dinner, Speeches, and entertainment and Trophy presentation with the nations competing to win the Triple Crown shields and overall trophy, along with the All-Events	C & D	Current rate free as voluntary organisation	No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		medal winners individually. Numbers attending – 100			
Community Relations in Schools	25 September 2024	Buddy Up! Celebration Event of 5-year project about peacebuilding with schools' pupils. Numbers attending – 80	C	Current rate free as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception
The Open University	25 November 2024	Celebration Event of British Academy funded research project - exploring the important role that theatre has played in establishing peace in Northern Ireland and in helping our communities to move forward. Numbers attending – 70	C	Current rate £300	No hospitality
British Psychological Society	3 December 2024	'Cultivating Connections' drinks reception for Sport & Exercise Psychologists attending their 3-day conference taking place in Hilton Hotel. Numbers attending – 100 - 120	A & B	<i>Commercial charge to be negotiated by City Solicitor</i>	No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st June, 2024**

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Confucius Institute at Ulster University	5 February 2025	<p>Chinese Year celebration – Year of the Snake – cultural event of speeches, prize giving and a range of musical / dance performances.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 200</p>	B & C	Current rate £300 as not charity or voluntary	No hospitality

**Minutes of the 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 22nd May.

Minutes of the Cost-of-Living Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Cost-of-Living Working Group of 6th June.

All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre of 7th June.

Chairperson