

# **Belfast City Council Constitution**

**[Version 0.26 – 13-09-12]**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Constitution sets out how the Council conducts its business, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these decisions are effective, efficient and transparent to local people.

Some of these procedures are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to determine. The Council will exercise all its powers and duties in accordance with the laws and its Constitution.

## What is in the Constitution?

The Constitution covers the following areas:

### Who we are

- The Council
- Councillors
- Residents
- Council Officers

### What we do

- the services we provide

### How we do it

- the structures and decision making processes
- the frameworks for delivery
- our Values

## **Supporting documents and policies - at a glance**

The Council's Constitution is underpinned by a suite of supporting documents and policies including -

- the Standing Orders
- the Scheme of Delegation for Chief Officers
- the Financial Regulations
- the Equality Scheme
- Code of Conduct for Officers
- Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Code of Governance
- Corporate Plan
- Publications Scheme

The updated Constitution will also need to reflect other key pieces of work which are being carried out including the review of procurement.

# 1 WHO WE ARE

## 1.1 The Council

Belfast City Council is the local authority with responsibility for the city of Belfast, the capital and largest city in Northern Ireland. The Council is the largest of any district council in Northern Ireland serving an estimated population of 268,700 (2010).

The Council performs five principal roles within its local area and district:

- a civic leadership role in providing a vision for Belfast and its people, working in partnership with others and investing for the future to ensure a better quality of life for our citizens,
- the direct provision of a number of services and facilities,
- the promotion of the arts, tourism, community and economic development,
- the regulation and licensing of certain activities relating to environmental health, consumer protection, building regulations, and public safety,
- a representative role on a number of bodies and Boards including Education and Health,
- a consultative role in relation to functions conducted by other Government bodies and agencies on issues such as planning, water, roads and housing.

### Legal Status

Belfast City Council was created following the last reorganisation of local government in Northern Ireland in 1972.

The Council was legally established on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1973 by the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. This Act of the Parliament of Northern Ireland constituted district councils to administer the twenty-six local government districts created by the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971, and abolished the existing local authorities in Northern Ireland.

## **City and Borough Status**

In 1613 King James I granted Belfast a Royal Charter making it a corporate borough. Belfast was made a City in 1888 by a Royal Charter granted by Queen Victoria. With the passing of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, Belfast became a County Borough on 1 April 1899.

Between 1613 and 1842 the first citizen of Belfast was known as a Sovereign. In 1842 this title was changed to Mayor and in 1892 Queen Victoria conferred the title of Lord Mayor. The prefix 'The Right Honourable' was granted in 1923 by King George V.

## **Wards**

Belfast City Council currently comprises 51 electoral wards, nominally one for each elected councillor. The 51 wards are grouped into nine District Electoral Areas (DEAs):

- Balmoral
- Castle
- Court
- Lagan Bank
- Lower Falls
- Oldpark
- Pottinger
- Upper Falls
- Victoria

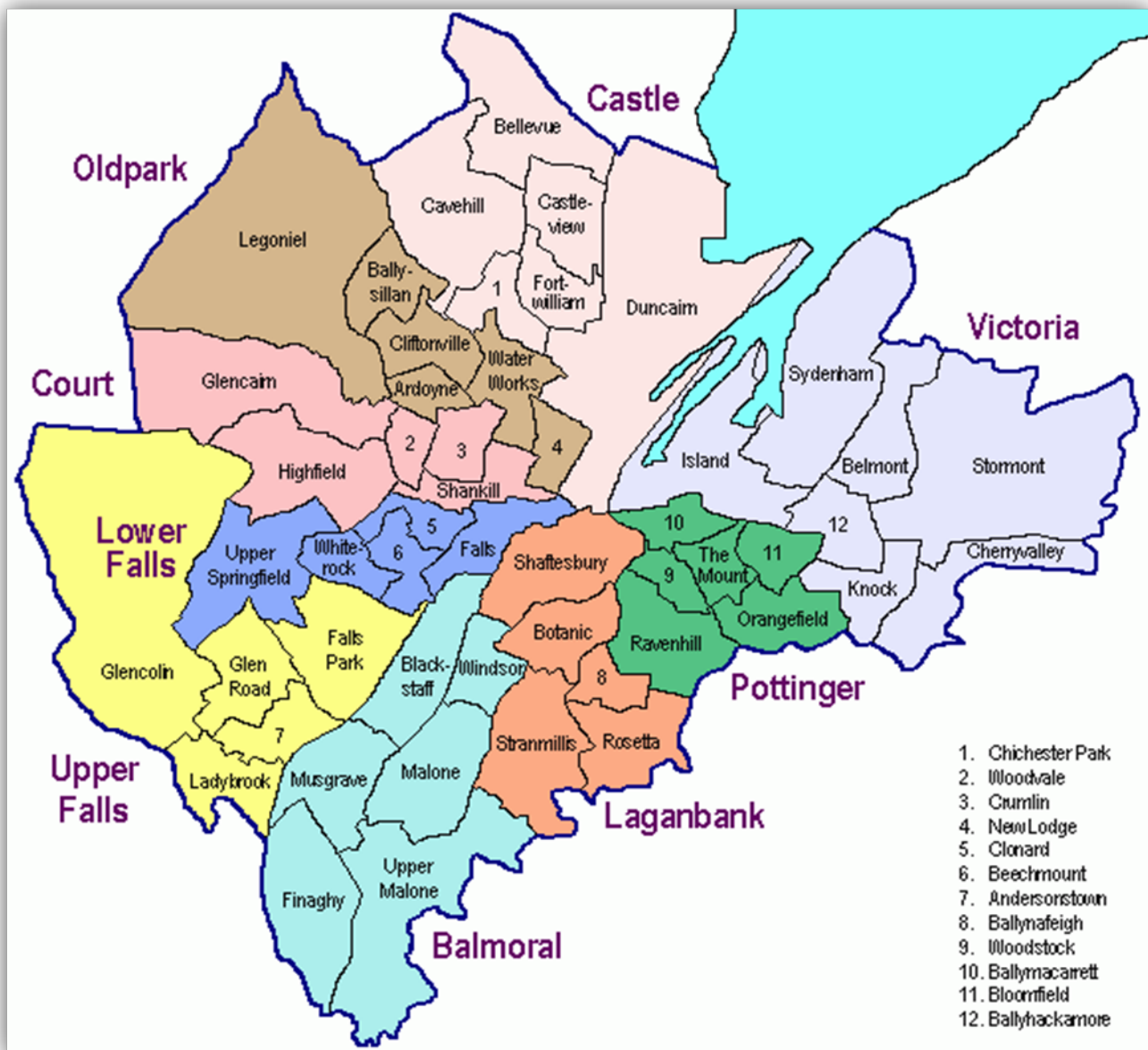
It is possible that the current electoral wards may be changed as a result of a boundary review. As part of the local government reform process referred to above, the Environment Minister has recently submitted into the NI Assembly the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012. This legislation sets out the proposed boundary for the new Belfast District area and the new wards which will fall within this; increasing from the current 51 to 60 wards. A copy of the draft Order is attached at Part 5 – Additional Documentation.

**Belfast has nine District Electoral Areas which contain 51 wards**

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Balmoral</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blackstaff</li> <li>• Finaghy</li> <li>• Malone</li> <li>• Musgrave</li> <li>• Upper Malone</li> <li>• Windsor</li> </ul> <p><b>Castle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bellevue</li> <li>• Castlevue</li> <li>• Cavehill</li> <li>• Chichester Park</li> <li>• Duncairn</li> <li>• Fortwilliam</li> </ul> <p><b>Court</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crumlin</li> <li>• Glencairn</li> <li>• Highfield</li> <li>• Shankill</li> <li>• Woodvale</li> </ul> | <p><b>Laganbank</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballynafeigh</li> <li>• Botanic</li> <li>• Rosetta</li> <li>• Shaftsbury</li> <li>• Stranmillis</li> </ul> <p><b>Lower Falls</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beechmount</li> <li>• Clonard</li> <li>• Falls</li> <li>• Upper Springfield</li> <li>• Whiterock</li> </ul> <p><b>Oldpark</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ardoyne</li> <li>• Ballysillan</li> <li>• Cliftonville</li> <li>• Legoniel</li> <li>• New Lodge</li> <li>• Waterworks</li> </ul> | <p><b>Pottinger</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballymacarrett</li> <li>• Bloomfield</li> <li>• Orangefield</li> <li>• Ravenhill</li> <li>• The Mount</li> <li>• Woodstock</li> </ul> <p><b>Upper Falls</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andersonstown</li> <li>• Falls Park</li> <li>• Glencolin</li> <li>• Glen Road</li> <li>• Ladybrook</li> </ul> <p><b>Victoria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballyhackamore</li> <li>• Belmont</li> <li>• Cherryvalley</li> <li>• Island</li> <li>• Knock</li> <li>• Stormont</li> <li>• Sydenham</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

**Local Government Reform - Review of Public Administration**

There is a major reform of local government underway within Northern Ireland which is likely to result in the creation of a new larger Belfast City Council with new statutory responsibility for planning and regeneration within the city.



Map of wards inserted here



## 1.2 Councillors

The Council has 51 elected Members, called councillors – representing the nine District Electoral Areas across the city. Under the current local government reform proposals and Boundaries Order, the number of elected Members will increase from 51 to 60.

Councillors play a key role in representing the interests of their constituents and electoral areas. They are responsible for ensuring that the views of the people of Belfast are reflected in the decisions that the council takes and the way in which services are delivered.

The Lord Mayor is a councillor who chairs the Council and is responsible for carrying out a number of civic duties.

To hold the office of Councillor a person must on the day of the election be:

- at least 18 years of age; and
- be a British Citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the European Union.

In addition, a person must fulfil one of the following three conditions:

- on both the day they are nominated and on polling day be a local elector for the district; or
- during the whole of the 12 months prior to the day of poll have occupied as owner or tenant, land in the district or have resided in the district; or
- their principal or only place of work during the last 12 months has been in the district.

## **Election and Terms of Office of Councillors**

Councillors are normally elected in local elections every four years.

A system of proportional representation is used to elect councillors in Belfast. This method enables parties with the most votes to have a stronger presence (i.e. more councillors) across the Council, whilst also enabling smaller parties to have a presence on the Council.

If a Council seat becomes vacant during a Council term, the vacancy is filled by way of the political party nomination system.

The Council may nominate up to one quarter of its Members as Aldermen. The position of Alderman does not impose any additional duties upon a Member nor does it imbue them with any additional authority.

## **Role of Councillors**

Each Councillor represents both a District Electoral Area within the city and the city as a whole. As a locally elected representative, the main duty of a Councillor is as a community leader, speaking, representing and acting for all local people, assisting them as individuals and ensuring that their constituents receive fair and proper treatment.

As a Member of the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of Belfast as a whole, taking decisions on Council policies and services provided by the Council and representing the Council on outside organisations.

Most candidates stand at the local election as a representative of established political parties. If elected, the Member will also have a responsibility to his or her political party to follow the party position on issues which arise.

A Councillor therefore has to balance the demands of being a constituency advocate and a city-wide strategist alongside the demands placed upon them as political party members.

All councillors will:

- i) Be policy makers and carry out a number of strategic corporate functions;
- ii) Be involved in the Council's decision making process;
- iii) Provide community leadership and representation;
- iv) Deal with individual casework and act as an advocate for constituents in resolving particular concerns or grievances;
- v) Be available to represent the Council on outside bodies; and
- vi) Adopt and maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics.

## **The Role of the Lord Mayor**

The Lord Mayor is a Councillor who is elected by the Council at its annual meeting in June. The term of office for the Lord Mayor is one year. The office of Lord Mayor cannot be held by a Councillor for more than two consecutive years.

The Lord Mayor usually does not continue to sit on any committees during the period of the Mayorship.

## **Duties and responsibilities**

The Lord Mayor of Belfast has a number of duties and responsibilities:

- presiding over council meetings and, in the case of equality of votes, he / she has a second or casting vote
- promoting and raising awareness of the council's main objectives and priority issues
- encouraging and supporting all aspects of life in Belfast by attending civic and public events
- receiving distinguished visitors to the city
- acting as host on behalf of the council and the citizens of Belfast at civic functions

- acting as a spokesperson to the local, national and international media
- providing an appropriate response on behalf of Belfast at times of local, national and international catastrophe
- supporting and encouraging charitable and other appeals as appropriate
- promoting Belfast's business, commercial, cultural and social life
- promoting Belfast as a place of excellence in which to do business and as a tourist destination.

### **The Role of the Deputy Lord Mayor**

The Deputy Lord Mayor is a Councillor who is also elected by the Council at its annual meeting in June. The term of office for the Deputy Lord Mayor is one year.

The Deputy Lord Mayor will assist and deputise for the Lord Mayor in carrying out the governance and civic responsibilities of that office.

In contrast to the Lord Mayor, the Deputy Lord Mayor usually continues to serve on Council committees during their year in office, combining this work with civic engagements.

### **The Role of the High Sheriff**

The High Sheriff is appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, usually upon the recommendation of the Council. The High Sheriff's term in office is from January until December.

#### **The High Sheriff will:**

- attend civic functions hosted by the Lord Mayor;
- undertake specific functions on behalf of the Council;
- attend functions in place of the Lord Mayor; and
- provide general support to the Lord Mayor.

The High Sheriff is also invited to greet a member of the Royal Family or Head of State visiting the County Borough, unless the visit is a private or purely working one. The High Sheriff and his/her spouse are introduced after the Lord Mayor.

## **Working together**

The three civic dignitaries, Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and High Sheriff, work closely together on projects and initiatives that enhance the profile of the City.

## **Rights and duties**

**Rights of access** - Councillors will have rights of access to documents, information, land and buildings of the Council as are necessary for the proper discharge of their functions and in accordance with the law

**Duty of confidentiality** - Councillors will not make known public information which is confidential or exempt without the consent of the Council or divulge information given in confidence to anyone other than a councillor / officer entitled to know it.

## **Conduct**

Councillors will comply with the Northern Ireland Code of Local Government Conduct and the Protocol for Relations between Councillors and Employees in Northern Ireland District Councils. Councillors will also comply with any additional protocols on Councillor / officer relationships which are agreed by the Council. The Code and the Protocol are contained within the NI Code of Local Government Conduct and are attached in Part 5 – Additional Documentation.

## **Declaration of Interests rules**

Councillors must usually declare any material interest/s that they have in a matter before the Council. A Councillor must do so as soon as they are aware of the interest. If a Councillor is at a meeting where a matter in which they have an interest is being discussed or voted on, the Councillor must not speak or vote on the matter and must withdraw from the meeting (after orally declaring the interest).

An interest can be either a financial (pecuniary) or non-financial (non-pecuniary) interest. The 'Members Guide to Interests' in Part 5 Additional Documentation contains a full description of the rules on declaration of interests, and what a Councillor must do if he/she believes that they have an interest.

## 1.3 Residents and the Council

### Residents' rights

Residents have the following rights in relation to how the Council conducts its business.

- (a) **Voting.** Residents on the electoral roll for the area have the right to vote to elect councillors to represent their area.
  
- (b) **Participation.** Residents have the right to:
  - (i) raise a concern or concerns with the Council regarding any Council service. Citizens can do so by contacting the Council directly and/or their local councillor; and
  - (ii) raise concerns and give opinions about the Council by responding to Council public consultations and surveys.
  
- (c) **Information.** Residents have the right to:
  - (i) attend any meetings of the Full Council, except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, subject to the restrictions imposed by the Council's Standing Orders;
  - (ii) view Council meetings online – see link to webcasting site <http://www.belfastcity.public-i.tv/core/>
  - (i) see and request copies of reports, background papers and minutes of any decisions made by the Council, except where these have been restricted under the Council's publication scheme; <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/government/index.asp> (the Council's equality scheme ensures that we consider requests for other languages when providing information and delivering services)
  - (ii) inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.
  - (iii) Request information under the Freedom of Information Act.
  
- (d) **Complaints.** Residents have the right to complain to:

- (i) the Council, by contacting the Council directly or by contacting a local councillor; and
- (ii) the Northern Ireland Ombudsman, after using the Council's own complaints scheme.

The contact point for complaints at the Council, and the contact details for the NI Ombudsman are as follows.

### **Online**

- fill in our online complaint form ([Online Complaint Form](#))
- download a complaint form ([Download Complaint Form](#))

### **By email**

- email us at [complaints@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### **By telephone**

- call 028 9032 0202 and ask to be put through to the relevant department or service
- call our central complaints helpline on 028 9027 0270 if you aren't sure who to speak to.

### **By text phone**

- contact us on 028 9027 0405.

### **By letter**

- fill in a standard complaint form (available from all our venues) and send it to:  
Corporate Complaints  
Belfast City Council  
FREEPOST  
BT1 5BR

### **More information**

For further details about our complaints procedure, call our complaints officer on 028 9027 0434.

## **2 WHAT WE DO**

### **2.1 The Council as civic leader**

As the only democratically elected body representing the people of Belfast, the Council provides leadership and strategic direction to shape, develop and manage the city. The Council continues to work with other organisations to generate wealth, protect the environment, promote equality, improve community relations and encourage local people to participate more in civic life.

The Council's recent development of a rolling Investment Programme, the establishment of both a City Investment Fund and a Neighbourhood Investment Fund have enhanced the basic role of the Council. The Council is now also an investor in the capital infrastructure of the City and does not just operate as a civic leader who convenes debate, but also utilises its own financial resources to create infrastructure in the City, whether it be the Titanic Signature Project, the Lyric, the MAC, Connswater Community Greenway or the other projects that will flow from the Council's Investment Programme.

Our Councillors are committed to addressing local needs and to dealing with the issues affecting local communities and the city. As many of these issues extend beyond the direct remit of the Council, the Council will use its convening power to bring together key partners from across the city and lobby to develop innovative solutions to the challenges facing Belfast. The Council's leadership role involves building relationships with the wide variety of organisations working to improve the city for the benefit of everyone.

At every opportunity the Council seeks to improve the economic, social and environmental development of Belfast and ensure that the city's resources are used in the most effective, efficient way possible to improve the quality of people's lives.

### **2.2 The Council as a service provider**

Belfast City Council is the largest of the 26 councils in Northern Ireland. It is responsible for delivering an extensive range of key services such as refuse collection and disposal, street cleansing, building control and environmental health, community development, indoor and outdoor leisure, parks and recreational facilities and support for the arts, tourism and economic development. The Council



has a range of regulatory and licensing responsibilities in areas such as environmental health, building control, waste control and street cleanliness.

The Council aims to provide the highest quality services to the people and businesses of Belfast. In so doing, the Council seek to ensure that all of its services are accessible and designed for the convenience of the people that use them – whether that means changing opening hours, as with earlier opening at leisure centres; providing better information and access, as with the Council’s improved website; or finding new ways to connect and engage, as through Council’s Youth Forum.

The Council will work to make the best use of all its resources to meet local needs and improve the quality of peoples’ lives.

The Council continues to invest significant capital funding towards improving our services and facilities as well as supporting key physical regeneration projects across the city

The Council is involved in a number of partnerships (including the Community Safety Partnership, ARC21 Waste Management Partnership, Belfast Healthy Cities, Investing for Health, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships and the Area Partnerships Boards) which are working to improve the quality of life for the people of Belfast.

## 2.3 Services provided by us

A full A-Z directory of the services provided by Belfast City Council is available at [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/atoz/](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/atoz/)

Set out below is a list some of the key services which are provided by the Council and funded using the income from the district rate:

### Parks and leisure

- **Leisure** The Council currently operate 10 leisure centres across Belfast.
- **Parks, open spaces and recreational grounds** Belfast has a wide variety of parks, sports pitches, playing fields, open spaces and playgrounds. It is also home to a diverse range of trees, wildlife and horticulture, as well as attractions like Belfast Zoo, Malone House and Belfast Castle

Belfast City Council manage and maintain two city parks, nine district parks, five country parks, 36 local parks, eight playing field sites, 76 playgrounds and four allotment sites across Belfast covering an area of approximately 3,000 acres. The Council looks after 11,000 trees on streets across the city.

### Environment

- **Rubbish, waste and recycling** - carry out all aspects of waste collection and disposal for Belfast. The Council have four recycling centres and three civic amenity sites. The Council also provide a free bulky household waste collection service.
- **Street cleaning** - clean over 444,000km of streets every year.
- **Building control** - responsible for enforcing the Building Regulations when building works are carried out within the Belfast City Council electoral area.

The Council deal with:

- how buildings are constructed
- inspection of construction work as it's carried out to make sure the necessary standards are met.

We also carry out other statutory legislative functions including:

- considering planning applications within the Belfast City Council area and submitting the Council's views to the Planning Service;
  - the licensing of places of entertainment, cinemas, and places storing petroleum. The licensing Committee has delegated authority and considers and determines applications for entertainment licences, amusement permits and street trading licenses.
  - dealing with dangerous structures
  - open and vacant premises
  - street naming and numbering
  - maintaining an extensive buildings archive, providing property information and 'property certificates' for the conveyancing process when buildings are being sold.
- **Public toilets** - providing public toilets at 15 sites across the city
  - **Regulatory and licensing responsibilities** - enforce regulatory and licensing functions in the fields of building control and environmental health. These functions range from monitoring food safety and consumer products to improving safety in buildings, the workplace and the wider environment.

## Registration services

- **Births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships** - responsibility for the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships in Belfast.
- **Cemeteries** - manage and maintain nine cemeteries and the City of Belfast Crematorium.

## The Economy

- **Economic Development** - The Council work with partners and the business sector to help develop the local economy for the benefit of our citizens. The Council seek to attract investment in the city, support our local businesses to grow and create jobs. As well as promoting Belfast as a place for commercial investment the Council works to secure additional sources of funding for the city. In particular to apply for major European Union and national grants and funding.
- **Culture, arts and tourism** - the Council work with partners to promote culture, arts and tourism in Belfast. The Council are involved in various activities that support culture and art. In particular the Council works to

promote Belfast as a place to visit and stay; and by doing so, the Council supports the tourism industry and the people it employs.

- **Events** - As part of the Council's support for culture and arts and to promote tourism, host a range of major events within the city.

## People, Communities and Neighbourhoods

- **Community facilities** - The Council manage 22 community centres across the city and provide various programmes and opportunities for local people.
- **Community development** – the Council provides support and opportunities to help local people and groups to help themselves to increase the activities within their communities.
- **Advice** – the Council supports the provision of advice service across the city to help citizens.
- **Youth Forum** - the Council facilitates the Belfast City Council Youth Forum.

## Other services

- **Management of venues and sites throughout Belfast** - manage Belfast City Hall, Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall, Belfast Castle, Malone House and Belfast Zoo. The Council also manages the Gasworks Business Park, St George's Market, Smithfield Market, Duncrue and Balmoral Industrial Estates and various other sites in Belfast.
- **Funding** - provide funding for various arms length bodies within Belfast in conjunction with private and public sector partners. These have included the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) and Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM).

The Council also provides funding to community groups, sports groups and community relations projects across Belfast.

- **Partnerships** - work in partnership with many agencies on joint initiatives including the Community Safety Partnership, ARC21 Waste Management Partnership, Belfast Healthy Cities, Investing for Health and the Area Partnerships Boards.

## At a glance - Services Provided By Belfast City Council

The Council is responsible for delivering an extensive range of services which play a key role in improving the quality of life of our citizens across the city.



Operating 10 leisure centres and 22 community centres across the city



Organising various sporting events including the Belfast City Marathon which takes place annually in May



Managing 2 city parks, 9 district parks, 5 country parks, 36 local parks, 8 playing field sites, 75 playgrounds and 4 allotment sites across the city covering an area of approximately 3,000 acres



Organising major civic events in the city including Halloween, Christmas and New Year celebrations, the Titanic 'Made in Belfast' Festival and the Belfast Maritime Festival



Carrying out all aspects of waste collection and disposal including operating 4 recycling centres, 2 civic amenity sites and 40 'bring' sites across the city. We also provide a free bulky household waste collection service



Providing grant aid to community groups, sports groups and community relations projects across Belfast



Managing the City Hall, Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall, Belfast Castle, Malone House and Belfast Zoo



Registering births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships in the city



Cleaning over 444,000km of streets every year



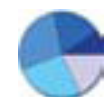
Providing a range of support programmes for businesses in the city



Managing the Gasworks Business Park, St. George's Market, Smithfield Market, Duncrue and Balmoral Industrial Estates and various other sites in the city



Promoting culture, arts and tourism in Belfast



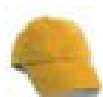
Providing a range of development programmes for communities in the city



Providing administrative support for the Belfast District Policing Partnership and its 4 area sub-groups



Operating a Consumer Advice Centre and Neighbourhood Development Office



Facilitating the Belfast City Council Youth Forum



Looking after 11,000 trees on streets across the city



Managing and maintaining 9 cemeteries and the City of Belfast Crematorium



Enforcing regulatory and licensing responsibilities, in line with the Government's Enforcement Concordat, in areas such as environmental health, building control, public health, pollution, street trading, shop opening hours, tattooing and ear piercing, health and safety at work and public entertainment licensing



Working in partnership with many agencies on joint initiatives including the Community Safety Partnership, ARC21 Waste Management Partnership, Belfast Healthy Cities, Investing for Health and the four Area Partnerships Boards



Considering planning applications within the city council area and submitting views to the Planning Service



Providing part-funding to the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) and Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) along with private and public sector partners

## **2.4 The impact of the Review of Public Administration**

The Council are preparing for the additional powers which will transfer to it as a result of the Review of Public Administration and the reform of local government.

The Council will therefore be responsible for the provision of a range of new services including local development plan functions, development control and enforcement, regeneration and community development and some aspects of local roads. The Council will update this section as the new services and responsibilities come on stream.

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## 3 HOW WE DO IT

### Part 1 – Structures and decision making

#### 3.1 Council and Committee Structure

##### Full Council

The full Council, which is a meeting of the 51 elected Members, takes place monthly except in July. The annual meeting of the full Council is held in June.

Every meeting of the full Council is open to the public and is also streamed live on the Council's website <http://www.belfastcity.public-i.tv/core/>. The Council may by resolution exclude the public from being able to attend a meeting if publicising the meeting would be prejudicial to the public interest. Members of the public may also be excluded if the resolution specifies reasons arising from the nature of the business to be transacted at the meeting.

##### Committees

The Council organises its business through six Standing Committees. A Standing Committee is a group of councillors appointed by the council who meet to review, scrutinise or make decisions on a range of functions within its particular remit. Committees sit at least monthly with the exception of July.

Each of the committees consists of 20 councillors with the quorum (the minimum number of councillors that are required to be present to transact business legally) of each committee being 5 members.

The party make-up of the committees and the allocation of Chairs and Vice Chairs of the committees reflect the overall weighting of each party in the Council.

Officers advise Councillors on issues addressed by Committees.

The rules which set out, and govern, Committee responsibilities are contained in the Standing Orders, a copy of which is attached in Part 5 – Additional Documentation.

The committees, with a brief explanation of their work areas, are as follows:

- **Strategic Policy and Resources Committee**

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for setting the Council's overall strategic policy, direction and priorities through the development of the Corporate Plan. It is responsible also for allocating the Council's resources (financial, employees and assets) and for performance management. The Committee is also responsible for the promotion of equality, diversity and good relations and the Council's human resources, corporate communications, procurement and IT functions.

- **Development Committee**

The Development Committee is responsible for the Council's role, remit, relationships and profile in the development and regeneration of the City and considers initiatives and issues which impact on the future development of Belfast. The Committee is responsible also for the Waterfront & Ulster Halls, economic development, community services, tourism, arts & cultural issues and European matters.

- **Parks and Leisure Committee**

The Parks and Leisure Committee is responsible for the planning and delivery of the Council's leisure, parks and cemeteries functions. Its specific responsibilities include the control and management of the Council's leisure facilities, parks, cemeteries, Belfast Castle, Malone House and Belfast Zoo.

- **Health and Environmental Services Committee**

The Health and Environmental Services Committee is responsible for all the Council's public health, community safety, waste management, building and environmental control functions, except for those which are assigned to the Licensing Committee.

- **Licensing Committee**

The Licensing Committee has delegated authority to consider all policy and legislation issues in relation to licensing matters including entertainment licences, amusement permits and regulatory matters such as street trading, Sunday trading and alcohol consumption in public places.

- **Town Planning Committee**

The Town Planning Committee is responsible for considering and commenting on planning applications in the Belfast City Council area. These views are then submitted to the Planning Service in the Department of the Environment (DOE).



The committee has delegated authority from the Council in this regard where its decisions are unanimous. The Committee is also responsible for considering and commenting on housing development programmes and proposals submitted by the Government and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Any decisions taken by the Standing Committees cannot be implemented until they have been ratified by the Full Council, except where committees have been granted delegated authority to make decisions. This means that the Council has authorised the committee to make decisions on specific matters.

### **3.2 Special Committees / Working Groups**

On occasion the Council may decide to establish a Special Committee or Working Group for a particular purpose.

Examples include the Audit Panel, Good Relations Panel, Budget and Transformation Panel, Governance Working Group and Area Working Groups.

### 3.3 The decision-making process

The Full Council is the overarching decision-making body.

Each of the committees submits draft budget proposals to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as part of the annual budget-setting process. The decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is in turn subject to approval by the Full Council.

The Full Council considers the decisions of the Standing Committees at each of its monthly meetings. The Council can adopt the decisions or amend them. In practice, most decisions by committees are approved by Full Council but it would be usual each month for a small number of decisions to be either rejected or amended or referred back to the relevant committee for further consideration.

The rules governing how Council meetings should be conducted and how decisions are approved and can be amended are contained in the Standing Orders (a copy of which can be found in Part 5 - Additional Documentation).

Decisions are contained in the Council minutes. These can be accessed on the Council's website <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/government/index.asp> or can be obtained in hardcopy by request.

#### **Delegated Decisions**

The Licensing Committee, Town Planning Committee, and Development Committee can each make certain decisions without the approval of full Council. These decisions are called delegated decisions.

The purpose of delegating decisions is to speed up the decision-making process for these specific day-to-day issues.

The Council's Standing Orders set out the various areas of delegated decision-making business which are allocated to the various Committees.

Some decision-making powers have also been delegated to Chief Officers (the directors of the Council departments). This is detailed below under 'The Council's Officers'.

### 3.4 The Council's Officers

The officers of the Council are directly employed by the Council in a variety of administrative, professional technical and operational roles. Depending on these roles, they advise the Council on all aspects of its functions, put into effect decisions that are taken by Councillors, and provide day to day management of the Council's services.

Officers are politically neutral; they advise committees and Full Council, and implement Council decisions.

Belfast City Council is made up of six departments, which work together to deliver high-quality services for everyone. They are:

- Chief Executive's Department
- Development Department
- Finance and Resources Department
- Health and Environmental Services Department
- Parks and Leisure Department
- Property and Projects Department

The **Chief Executive** is the Chief Officer – with overall responsibility for the management and implementation of Council services. Each of the Council's six departments is led by a **Chief Officer**, who is the most senior officer in the Department.

#### **Councillors and officers**

There are codes of conduct which govern the relationships between Councillors and officers of the Council. In general terms, the Councillors are the decision-making arm of the Council and the officers are there to administer and carry out the decisions made by the Council.

In order for the Council to provide the best service to its citizens it is essential that there is a good working relationship between the Councillors and the officers. Both of the codes of conduct stress the importance of officers and Councillors working

together in an atmosphere of mutual trust. It is accepted that officers and Councillors should observe reasonable courtesy in dealing with each other.

The codes of conduct for officers and Councillors are contained in both the separate codes of conduct governing Councillors and officers in Part 5 - Additional Documentation. The Council may also develop additional protocols and it will be the duty of both Councillors and officers to abide by these.

### **3.5 Scheme of Delegation**

The Scheme of Delegation sets out a range of decision making powers which allow Chief Officers to make certain decisions, under delegated authority, on behalf of the Council. The Scheme of Delegation is designed to aid the smooth running of the organisation, the effective, efficient and timely delivery of services and it should be interpreted accordingly.

The Scheme does not delegate to Chief Officers:

- i) Any matter reserved to full Council and which by law may not be delegated to officers – that is the power of making a rate, or of borrowing money or of acquiring, holding or disposing of land
- ii) The adoption of any new policy or major change to an existing agreed Council policy

The Scheme of Delegation is contained in Part 5 – Additional Documentation

Officers must adhere to a Code of Conduct to ensure high standards in the way they carry out their duties. The Code of Conduct for Employees is contained in Part 5 - Additional Documentation.

### **3.6 Financial, Contractual and Legal Obligations**

Financial Regulations provide the framework for managing the Council's financial affairs and sets out the rules and processes that underpin the day to day management of public funds.

The management of the Council's financial affairs will be conducted in accordance with the financial regulations contained in Part 5 – Additional Documentation

The Council's processes are conducted in accordance with all relevant law.

In particular, the Council is a public authority which fully embraces the principles of equality and good relations as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Council is also committed to the principles of open and transparent governance, as set out in the Code of Governance in Part 5 - Additional Documentation.

### Our Governance

Governance is about how Belfast City Council ensures that it does the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and, where appropriate, leads its community.

Belfast City Council is committed to good governance. To this end, the Council has formally adopted a Code of Governance (see Part 5 – Additional Documentation) based on the following principles of good governance:

1. Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.
2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
3. Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
4. Taking informed transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.
5. Developing the capacity and capability of Members to be effective and ensuring that officers also have the capability and capacity to deliver effectively.
6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust local public accountability.

To address each of these principles, the Council has a range of policies and processes.

The key policies / processes to promote good governance in include:

- An Audit Panel which oversees the Council's control environment, reporting to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
- A dedicated internal audit section
- A risk management process
- Business Continuity management arrangements
- An anti fraud policy and whistle blowing policy
- A fraud and corruption policy
- Financial regulations and budgetary control
- Gifts and Hospitality and Conflict of Interests policies
- A performance management system

The Code of Governance is reviewed on an annual basis and supports the production of an Annual Governance Statement which is incorporated into the Council's annual financial statements.

## Our Finances

The Council spends approximately £175m a year in running costs, known as “Revenue” expenditure. This includes expenditure on the provision of services and the cost of financing the Investment Programme for the City.

Funding of the £175m annual expenditure comes from external income received by the Council, with 75% of this arising from the District Rate and the remainder generated through fees and charges for the services the Council provides and receipt of grants and rents from commercial properties.

The District Rate is the most important source of revenue income for the Council with two thirds of the District Rate generated from the business sector. The impact of the economy on businesses in the City is of particular important to the Council.

The annual rates bill received by ratepayers is made up of the District Rate (45%) and Regional Rate (55%). More information on rates and the rating system can be found in the “Councillor’s Guide to the Rates” published by Belfast City Council and attached in Part 5 – Additional Documentation.

The financing costs included within the Council’s annual revenue budget support the delivery of capital expenditure in the Council’s Investment Programme. Capital expenditure is expenditure on development projects in the city which will create a future asset for the Council or the City and the capital element of the Investment Programme is structured in three parts:-

- **The Capital Programme** - provides expenditure to create new or to replace or improve Council facilities, assets or infrastructure. This is normally financed through loans as the expenditure creates an asset for the Council.
- **The City Investment Strategy** – provides expenditure to support the development of landmark schemes in the City and lever additional investment into Belfast. As the completed assets won’t belong to the Council, they are normally financed through one-off payments rather than by loans.
- **The Local Investment Strategy** - provides expenditure on smaller scale development projects in local communities which will lever additional investment for these communities.



The Medium Term Financial Plan contains the detailed financial planning intentions of the Council for one year together with the financial implications of plans and commitments for the subsequent two years. This ensures that financial planning and decision making is made within a three year timescale and considers the affordability and sustainability of expenditure plans.

A major strand of the Medium Term Financial Plan is the Council's Efficiency Programme. The programme focuses on the following themes and will have generated £20m of cash savings by the end of the current Council term in 2014/15:-

- Assets and Land
- Procurement
- Budgetary Challenge
- ICT
- Service and Employee Costs Reviews
- Income Generation

## Our People

The Council's Human Resources service provides strategic direction, policy development and professional advice and assistance in relation to human resource activities that support the council. The key support services HR provides are:-

- Learning and Development
- Organisational Development
- Employee Relations
- Employee Resourcing
- Pay and Reward
- Equality and Diversity

The Human Resources service is responsible for:

- delivering the employability initiatives contained in the Council's Investment Programme and does this through partnership working with bodies such as DEL, Belfast Metropolitan College and the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) providers across the city etc by;
- it plays a key role in organisation development to ensure the Council has the capacity to deliver its objectives and value for money services;
- and ensures the Council has fit for purpose and legally compliant HR policies and procedures in order to support managers to effectively manage the Council's people on a day-to-day basis.

These policies, procedures and guidance notes include:

- Attendance Policy
- Capability Procedure
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Equal Opportunities Policy Statement
- Flexible Retirement Guidance and Information
- Flexible Working Scheme
- Grievance Procedure

- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection
- Policy on Redundancy etc (can't remember correct name)
- Unfair Treatment Guidelines
- Work Life Balance Handbook
- Anonymous Complaints Procedure
- Procedure for dealing with cases of criminal misconduct
- Categorisation Procedure

### **Workforce Development**

Belfast City Council recognises the importance of continuously developing its workforce to make sure the Council have the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to meet the needs of our citizens and customers.

Management and trade unions have jointly agreed a learning and development policy to ensure that opportunities for learning and development are managed and accessed in a fair and consistent way.

A number of sections and departments across the organisation have attained the Investors in People (IIP) standard on an individual basis and the Council achieved corporate IIP accreditation in 2012.

### **Member Development**

Belfast City Council has been recognised for its innovative and progressive approach to elected member development by recently becoming the first council in Northern Ireland to obtain the Member Development Charter. The Council will continue to support our elected members as the environment around us evolves and the need for strong political leadership takes on a greater prominence.

### **Staff Profile**

Belfast City Council currently employs over 2,500 employees, full time and part time, permanent and temporary. There are currently approximately 62% male and 38% female permanent employees. The Council also employs a number of employees on a casual / seasonal basis. The Council provide work placements and engage in programmes for the unemployed and those with criminal convictions.

The Council have a diverse workforce and like all organisations in Northern Ireland, monitor the composition of the workforce as well as applicants to the Council, by religion / community background and gender. The Council report annually to the Equality Commission and then complete a very detailed return to ECNI every three years.

Terms and conditions and pay are negotiated nationally through NJC.

The council is committed to carrying out an equal pay review every three years; this is conducted jointly between management and trade union representatives.

### **Trade Unions**

Close working with the trade unions is essential in order to ensure that our workforce improvements can be delivered. The Council do this through the Joint Consultative Committee and employ two TU Co-ordinators.

We have four main TU's which make up the council's TU group - UNITE, GMB, NIPSA and SIPTU.

The purpose of the Trade Union Group is to facilitate the broadest possible agreement between the recognised trade unions in negotiation and discussion with the council on issues such as corporate policies and procedures, workforce development and organisational reviews.

Each trade union offers representation and expertise for individual members involved in workplace issues such as grievance, disciplinary, sickness absence procedures and health and safety issues.

## Our Communications

The Council is committed to informing, engaging and responding to our ratepayers in relation to our elected members, council decisions, how the Council spends its money, the services and facilities the Council provide and the initiatives the Council undertake across the city to improve the lives of all our citizens.

The Council manage the brand, image and reputation of the organisation as well as the city 'B' brand.

The Council communicates directly through:

- The Council's residents' magazine City Matters, which is distributed to over 130,000 homes in Belfast five times a year;
- The Council's website, which has more than 2 million unique visitors each year, and through which the Council now webcast all meetings of the Council to improve public accessibility to the workings of the council;
- increasingly through the Council's social networking presence on Twitter and Facebook;
- Information videos through our website and on YouTube;
- Photographic images on Flickr.

The Council work with the local media, including television, radio and newspapers, to provide information to our citizens, issuing around 500 press releases and responding to over 1,500 media queries each year.

The Council also communicates through the use of advertising, leaflets and other publications, most of which are published and printed through our in-house graphic design, publications and advertising team.

The Council staff are a major asset and it is important that they are kept informed. The Council does this through a quarterly staff publication, an intranet site and other internal communications systems.

In addition, the Council takes on board the views of our ratepayers through a bi-annual public survey and on an ongoing basis through our social networking sites, complaints procedures and community meetings.

## 4 Our Values

Our corporate values are integral to the way in which the Council works. These values underpin everything that our Councillors and employees do and the way the Council will deliver our objectives. The Council will:

1. **Focus on the needs of customers, foster a 'can-do' attitude and be problem solvers** - providing first class services which are responsive to citizens needs and continuing to ensure that the council is a place where things happen
2. **Provide value for money and improve services** –delivering high quality, value for money services at all times and continually improving our services
3. **Work together** – working with our partners across Belfast to ensure that our combined efforts contribute to the continued success of our city
4. **Respect each other, be fair, promote equality and good relations** – improving access to our services; valuing diversity, ensuring that everyone shares in the city's success and tackling discrimination in all its forms by treating all communities and people equally
5. **Act sustainably** – using our resources effectively and efficiently and promoting the principle of sustainability in all our activities
6. **Ensure the highest standards of health and safety** –maintaining the highest possible standards of health and safety at all times to ensure the Council protect our employees and all those who use our services
7. **Value our employees** –continuing to support our employees to help them fulfill their potential

## 5 Additional Documentation

In this section will be appended all of the individual pieces of documentation referred to in sections 1 – 5.

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