

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd April, 2021

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

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

Also attended: Councillor Ferguson.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational
Strategy;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st April, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Walsh declared an interest in respect of items 5c – Heritage Trail Sign Policy – City Hall and item 5d - James Connolly Heritage Trail Sign, on the basis that he was involved in the James Connolly Heritage Trail initiative, and left the meeting whilst those items were being discussed.

Restricted Items

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

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

Medium Term Financial Plan/Commercial Plan

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan and seeking approval to adopt the Council's first Commercial Plan.

He explained that the Medium Term Financial Plan needed to be based on a fair and honest appraisal of the Council's financial position and of its capacity to release resources internally and generate additional external income. The Financial Plan needed also to reflect the funding environment within which the Council operated and reference was made to the Covid-19 pandemic and earlier Primark fire as being examples of how the financial demands placed on the Council could, without warning, increase in severity.

The Director reported that, following the completion of the rate setting process for 2021/22, the Council had a good understanding of the current financial position, although this could be impacted by any Covid-19 funding decisions made by the Department for Communities. He drew the Members' attention to revenue estimate movements for the period from 2016/17 to 2021/22 and pointed out that the Council's financial strategy over that period could be summarised by, amongst other things, keeping the annual rates increase below 2%, maximising external funding and using growth in the rate base to support recurrent funding of new priorities such as regeneration and the Belfast Region City Deal.

He highlighted the fact that Members were ambitious for both the City and its residents and referred to new emerging priorities such as climate mitigation and adaptation, economic recovery and inclusive growth. Officers would, over the coming months, be working to develop detailed plans around those priorities, including the revenue and capital implications for the Council. Further reports would be submitted to the Committee outlining ways in which the Council could generate additional income, support the growth in the rate base, maximise external funding opportunities and deliver additional efficiencies.

The Director went on to draw the Committee's attention to the Commercial Plan, which would play a key role in maximising the use of existing resources and income generation moving forward. The Plan, which had been revised to reflect the feedback received from each of the Political Parties, would seek primarily to contribute to the Council's investment plans and efficiency programme and to recover and rebuild in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to support that work, the following six strategic aims had been identified:

- i to maximise opportunities to deliver more for our citizens, including those which are most vulnerable;
- ii to make better use of our assets for our citizens by achieving positive outcomes and superior value;

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- iii to ensure the delivery of our services in the most cost-effective way;
- iv to contribute towards meeting the significant financial challenges faced by the Council by ensuring that we achieve value-for-money;
- v to adopt a commercial culture, whilst retaining strong public, community and social values; and
- vi to work with partners who share our vision and ambitions and continue to put the best interests of Belfast's residents at the heart of everything we do.

The Director explained that the Council would, over the next three years, focus upon two work streams to assist it in delivering its strategic aims, namely, enhancing culture and competency and making better use of assets and delivering sustainable and value-for-money services and concluded by recommending that the Committee approve the Commercial Plan.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update on the Medium Term Financial Plan and agreed, with one Member voting against, to approve the Commercial Plan.

Malone House - Options Paper

The Director of Finance and Resources reminded the Committee that it had, earlier in the meeting, approved the Council's first Commercial Plan.

With that in mind, he submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which presented a number of options around the future uses and management arrangements/operating models for Malone House, which was situated within Barnett Demesne.

He explained that, since 1983, Malone House had become a venue for weddings, conferences, social functions, private dining and other events, with catering operations currently being provided by an external catering company, which operated under an agreed contract with the Council. However, it was recognised that there was now a need to examine future uses and management arrangements/operating models, with a view to addressing both the current and potential future needs of local residents and visitors.

Accordingly, he drew the Members' attention to the following options:

Option 1 - 'Do Nothing'/Status Quo;

Option 2 - 'Do Minimum' – catering operation is insourced i.e. delivered by the Council;

Option 3 - A suitably experienced and dynamic individual(s)/ business(es) is identified to operate Malone House;

Option 4 - Alternative use or management/operating model for Malone House; and

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Option 5 - Dispose of Malone House (included for illustrative purposes only).

The Director reviewed each option in turn and stated that, on balance, it was considered that Option 3 offered the greatest potential to make better use of this important physical asset, in terms of fulfilling the needs of local residents and visitors, and he recommended that the Committee adopt that option.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Committee agrees to adopt Option 4.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McAllister,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

That the Committee agrees to adopt Option 3, as recommended within the report.

On a recorded vote, twelve Members voted for the amendment and eight against and it was declared carried.

<u>For 12</u>	<u>Against 8</u>
The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and Councillors Bunting, Heading, Lyons, McAllister, McDonough-Brown, McReynolds and Pankhurst.	Councillor Black (Chairperson); and Councillors Beattie, Carson, Garrett, Groogan, McLaughlin, Murphy and Walsh.

The amendment was thereupon put to the meeting as the substantive motion and passed.

Good and Harmonious Working Environment

In response to an issue which had been raised by a Member in relation to background images being displayed by another Member during this and previous remote meetings, in the context of promoting a good and harmonious working environment, the Committee agreed to refer the matter to the Party Group Leaders for consideration.

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Council Appointments

The Committee noted that, following recent recruitment exercises, Ms. Debbie Caldwell and Ms. Catherine Matthews had been appointed to the posts of Climate Commissioner and Operational Director of City and Neighbourhood Services (Waste Control), respectively.

**Update on Organisational Recovery
and Covid Management**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided information on:

- i. the opening of Council services and facilities, as part of a series of relaxations which had been announced by the Northern Ireland Executive under its Pathway out of Restrictions; and
- ii. the Council's ongoing work around organisational recovery and Covid-19 management.

Belfast Destination Hub – Acquisition of Site 10

The Committee:

- i noted the update on the site acquisition process for the Belfast Destination Hub, following the Committee's decision of 18th September, 2020 to authorise officers to examine options for the acquisition of the Corporately endorsed preferred site at Royal Avenue/North Street (Site 10), including seeking legal advice and real estate valuation;
- ii noted the position regarding the City Deal Outline Business Case timeline and the criticality of a decision on the acquisition of a site;
- iii agreed that a site visit be undertaken to Site 10 and that a further briefing session be organised, to which an external expert valuation specialist and economist would be invited;
- iv agreed that the leaders of those Political Parties who were not represented on the Committee be invited to the site visit and briefing session; and
- v noted that a report requiring a decision on the acquisition of the site would be submitted to its meeting in May.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion – Funding for the Citywide Tribunal Service

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 1st April, the following motion on Funding for the Citywide Tribunal Service had been proposed by Councillor Ferguson and seconded by Councillor Matt Collins:

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“This Council notes with alarm that the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service once again faces closure due to a lack of funding.

The Council is deeply concerned with the lack of core funding offered to this service over the past year and notes that the recent Department for Communities budget did not include a necessary funding package to retain this vital service.

The Council, therefore, calls on the Minister for Communities to immediately release core funding for the Citywide Tribunal Service of £256,769 per annum, in order to meet the growing need and pressure which the service faces and calls for an urgent meeting with the Minister, with a view to securing its long term future.

Until then, the Council will provide £128,500 through its reserves, if necessary and refers the matter to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.”

The Director of Finance and Resources reported that the Council had, in the previous year, provided funding of £75,000 to the Citywide Tribunal Service, following the completion of a due diligence exercise. The Department for Communities had contributed £70,400 over the same period but it was his understanding that it had yet to allocate funding for this year. He confirmed that, should the Committee be minded to provide funding of £128,500, as called for in the motion, £75,000 could be made available immediately from the Council’s reserves. The Council would, however, be required to undertake additional due diligence to justify the allocation of the remaining £53,500. He added that the City and Neighbourhood Services Department had provided the Service with £15,000 of grant funding towards the development of a sustainable financial model, moving forward, and that work on that was continuing but would be unlikely to be completed within the current year.

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor Ferguson highlighted the importance of the Citywide Tribunal Service and pointed out that it had been forced to operate year-on-year without a clear core funding commitment. She explained that the Service could provide Council officers with valid reasons for the increase in its costs and referred also to the increased workload which staff were facing, particularly around the Personal Independent Payment tribunal process, and the uncertain operating conditions in which they were working. She urged the Committee to support her request for £128,500 to be allocated to the Service to allow it to remain open for the period ahead and concluded by stressing the need to meet with the Minister for Communities at the earliest opportunity to discuss its long-term future.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. agreed to allocate funding of £75,000 from the Council’s reserves to the Citywide Tribunal Service for this year; and
- ii. agreed, in principle, to allocate the remaining £53,500 to the Citywide Tribunal Service, subject to all due diligence requirements being met, with a report on the outcome of that process being submitted to a future meeting.

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**Motion- Uplift on Universal Credit –
Response from Minister for Welfare Delivery**

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 7th January, had passed the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Heading and seconded by Councillor Lyons:

“This Council recognises the positive impact of the £20 uplift on Universal Credit implemented in April 2020.

The Council also recognises that, since March 2020, the unemployment claimant count has doubled to at least 60,000 in Northern Ireland and with a recession expected in the spring only to worsen the situation for many households. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed to provide certainty that the £20 uplift on UC will remain beyond March 2021 meaning many families are potentially facing a loss of £1,040 a year to their incomes overnight. Charity Action for Children has warned that more than one in 10 families in the north are already having to choose between paying bills and eating meals.

The Council calls on the UK government to put a protective shield around struggling families by ensuring that March's Budget makes clear that Universal Credit will not be cut by £20 a week in the spring. Finally, the Council agrees to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting he maintain the £20 uplift on Universal Credit in April 2021 and extending the £20 uplift to all legacy benefits.”

The City Solicitor reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 19th February, it had noted a response from HM Treasury, on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and had agreed that a further letter be forwarded to the Chancellor highlighting the importance of the uplift payment, given the high levels of poverty in Northern Ireland, and urging him to extend it beyond March, 2021.

He reported that Will Quince MP, Minister for Welfare Delivery, had, within his response to that letter, pointed out that, since the start of the pandemic, the Government's priority had been to protect lives and people's livelihoods. With that in mind, the Chancellor had announced in the recent Budget that the Government would be extending the temporary £20 a week increase in Universal Credit for a further six months, until the end of September, taking it well beyond the end of this national lockdown. Eligible Working Tax Credit claimants would receive a one-off payment of £500. The Minister had concluded by stating that it was right that the Government should now shift its focus to supporting people back into work and that it had a comprehensive Plan for Jobs which the Budget would build upon.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Governance

**Freedom of the City – Frontline
Workers and Covid-19 Response**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the options available to deliver a public facing programme to recognise the work of the city’s frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The options are set out to safely deliver a programme in the context of ongoing Covid-19 and inclusive of budget implications.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the proposal within this report and to agree the recommended option for a programme of events from May – October, 2021.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 22nd May 2020, it was agreed to award the Freedom of the City to healthcare workers and all those working tirelessly on the frontline to care for vulnerable citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, with Members agreeing that a report outlining proposed arrangements for this to be submitted in due course. Therefore, this report sets out a proposed programme to include both a reflective event of commemoration as well as a citywide recognition event with community participation.

Frontline Workers Freedom of the City

- 3.2 The Council has agreed to stage an event to recognise the contribution of all frontline workers during the Covid-19 crisis. Following consideration of the likely timeline for the return of live events in line with the roll out of the vaccination programme, this report sets out a recommended way forward.

**PROGRAMME OF EVENTS aligned to City Recovery and UNESCO
City of Music bid**

- 3.3 The concept would be to deliver a programme that would run from May 2021 through to autumn 2021. The beginning and end of the

programme would be symbolically marked with an event. The final event would include the Freedom of the City ceremony.

Strand One: Reflection through the Symbolism of Planting Trees

- 3.4 May 2021: Announcement/ launch of the programme with an appropriately reflective event to recognise the challenges the city has faced, including the loss of lives. It is proposed that this should be a tree planting event.
- 3.5 This element of the concept would entail symbolically marking the Freedom of the City with tree planting which would run alongside the wider programme of events, allowing for a physical memorial to the shared experience of the pandemic. Our public spaces have seen considerably higher usage and have been critical in supporting physical and mental wellbeing. This concept also ties in with ongoing Council strategies such as One Million Trees.
- 3.6 This strand of the programme would support the planting of a memorial tree in the grounds of Belfast City Hall, subject to appropriate planning considerations. It is proposed that a distinct evergreen variety be selected to provide a year round memorial. The planting of the tree in May this year would launch the Freedom of the City programme.

Strand Two: Honouring the Contribution of City's Frontline Workers and Communities

- 3.7 The second strand of the programme will be developed around the theme of music. Music has played an important part in people overcoming the challenges of Covid-19 and creatively is the ideal art form to signal the beginnings of recovery. In addition, 2021 marks the submission of the city's bid to be recognised as a UNESCO City of Music. We already have Committee approval to award 5 City of Music bursaries that will create 5 'musicians in residence' for the city. It is envisaged that this cohort of artists would be joined by a further 5 musicians to deliver a Freedom of the City music programme. This residency programme would be launched in May and would be delivered across the city working with up to 10 different groups, all of them having had a particular experience of Covid. This could be a community group, a group of frontline workers, a school, a women's group etc. Each 'residency' will produce their own version of 'Mix the City' - a unique music composition that tells their Covid story. All groups will then come together to create an overall composition that symbolises the city of Belfast – A Mix of the City.

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- 3.8** By Autumn 2021, a Belfast Album would be created to be released. An official Freedom of the City event could then take place at the City Hall or alternative appropriate venue.
- 3.9** This main stage event would include profiled acts, breakthrough artists and a live performance of the new Belfast track with all the community participants. In addition, there would be a screening of a specially commissioned film that captures the city's response to Covid and personal stories.
- 3.10** A series of satellite events could take place (with digital link-ups) to maximise community participation through a 'music version' of the clap for carers moment with a performance of Mix the City led by musicians on the main stage with audience participation across the city.
- 3.11** The overall programme would include:
- Direct Community Participants: 150 via 10 groups
 - Core musician team of 10
 - Headline music acts at final event
 - The Current Lord Mayor would launch initiative in May with incoming Lord Mayor participating in closing event in the Autumn
 - Film produced capturing the individual 'Belfast Stories' of Covid. This could also contribute to Belfast Stories/Belfast Destination Hub Story Collection strand of work, as would the music commissioned
 - Potential to work with a media partner

Covid-19

- 3.12** Officers are aware of the implications on mass gatherings in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic. The cultural, arts and events sector has been one of the many societal areas impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Restrictions are likely to remain in place impacting the number of people permitted to gather indoor and outdoor. A timeline for the return of local, national and international events has not yet been set out however discussions are emerging around the likely return of events previously cancelled or postponed. This has obvious implications for the delivery of any chosen option. It is for this reason that any option with an 'event' element has been proposed for no earlier than September 2021. The date of this final event can continue to be flexible to ensure that Covid guidance and public safety remain at the forefront of all plans.

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- 3.13 The proposed programme seeks to reflect the remarkable efforts of the city throughout the pandemic and has at its core an ethos of being both a caring and a creative city.**

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 The programme costs would be met from within existing budgets due to plans for a city event to mark the bid for UNESCO designation.**

Equality and Good Relations Implications

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

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed to proceed with the commissioning of a stained glass window to be installed in the City Hall to mark the contribution which those working in the Health Service had made to the lives of the citizens of Belfast, in line with a motion which had, on 3rd May, 2016, been referred by the Council to the Diversity Working Group for consideration but had yet to be progressed.

Council/Committee Meetings - Post 6th May, 2021

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose arrangements for holding Council/Committee meetings following the expiry of the legislation permitting the hosting of remote meetings.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to agree to changes to Standing Orders, as set out in the report, to enable the current arrangements for the hosting of remote meetings to continue.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 As Members will be aware, the Council has had to alter its normal decision-making processes during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that it is following Public Health Agency guidance on social distancing and essential travel, while maintaining continuity of critical services, and is currently holding Council and Committee meetings remotely via Microsoft Teams.**

- 3.1.2 The authority to meet remotely is governed by Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The aim of this provision is allow local authority meetings to be held remotely, including remote access by members of the public, subject to the relevant national authority making the appropriate regulations.
- 3.1.3 The relevant legislation was made by the Northern Ireland Assembly - The Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of District Council Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 – and came into effect from 1st May, 2020.
- 3.2 **Key Issues**
- 3.2.1 The key issue is that, whilst regulations are currently in place, these expire on 6th May, 2021, meaning that, without steps being taken, the Council and its Committees can no longer meet remotely to make decisions after that date and would be required to be physically ‘present’ to make decisions.
- 3.2.2 There is currently no provision to allow the Assembly to extend the regulations as they were enacted in exercise of the powers conferred by section 78 (3) of the Coronavirus Act 2020 – *‘The regulations may make provision only in relation to local authority meetings required to be held, or held, before 7th May, 2021.’*
- 3.2.3 This is a UK-wide issue and a number of organisations [the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) have been lobbying the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to change primary legislation to enable local authority remote meetings to take place beyond the current statutory deadline of 6th May 2021. The Secretary of State has indicated that he has no plans to extend the date, as it requires primary legislation and there is no vehicle to do that in time for May.
- 3.2.4 Accordingly ADSO and LLG, in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council, have commenced legal proceedings in the High Court to allow for the continuation of local authority meetings beyond 6th May (as of 27/3/21 the claim has been issued in the High Court and they are awaited for the case to be listed for hearing).
- 3.2.5 However, that challenge is to the Local Government Act 1972 which applies to local authorities in England, so even, if successful, the Department of Communities will have to determine whether this applies to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 which governs Council/Committee meetings and proceedings in Northern Ireland.

- 3.2.6 The Permanent Secretary to the Department for Communities has indicated that she is aware of the position and that the Department is working on the introduction of the legislative changes needed to ensure that powers to operate remotely are extended.
- 3.2.7 She has also stated that, due to legislative time pressures, it is possible that there may be a short period between the lapse of the current legislative cover and the introduction of changes when councils may need to consider other arrangements.
- 3.2.8 Therefore, in the absence of new legislation, the authority to hold remote meetings will expire on 6th May, 2021 and Members are being asked to consider changes to Standing Orders, which the City Solicitor is of the opinion fall within the legal powers of the Council and which will enable the current arrangements to be retained.

3.3 Rationale

- 3.3.1 Section 37 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires a council to make standing orders for the 'regulation of the proceedings and business' of the council. The provision also permits the variation of standing orders.
- 3.3.2 Section 17(3) of the Interpretation Act (NI) 1954 provides that, if legislation empowers or requires something be done, then all such powers as are reasonably necessary to enabling this or are reasonably incidental to that are also given. Section 31 of the same Act provides that legislation is to be applied to circumstances as they occur in the sense that the legislation is 'always speaking'.
- 3.3.3 The above legislation in combination provides the basis on which the council can, in the City Solicitor's opinion, vary standing orders to achieve essentially the same impact as the 2020 Regulations.

3.4 Proposed Changes

Remote Attendance

- 3.4.1 Meetings of the council are not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a 'place' where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

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3.4.2 A member of a council ('a member in remote attendance') attends the meeting at any time if all of the following conditions are satisfied. Those conditions are that the member in remote attendance is able at that time—

(a) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard, and where practicable be seen by, the other members in attendance;

(b) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, any members of the public in attendance in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting; and

(c) to be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public in attendance.

3.4.3 A Member, or a member of the public, attending a meeting or being in attendance includes that person attending by remote access.

3.4.4 Schedule 5 to the 2014 Act (meetings and proceedings) applies to meetings of the Council as follows—

(a) any reference to being 'present' at a meeting includes being present through remote attendance;

(b) any reference to a 'place' where a meeting is held, or is to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers; and

(c) in addition to the publication of notice of the time and place at the offices of the council such notice of remote meetings will be published within the required time on the Council website.

3.5 Public Access

3.5.1 A meeting being 'open to the public' includes access to the meeting through remote means including (but not limited to) video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming and where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend in person; and being 'present' at a meeting includes access through remote means.

3.6 Access to Information

3.6.1 Any information to which the public is entitled to access (agenda and unrestricted reports) will be made available on the Council's website in addition to any duty for publication arising under the 2014 Act.

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3.7 Decision-Making

- 3.7.1 Any references in the 2014 Act to ‘members present and voting on the decision’ includes a member being present through remote attendance.**

3.8 Financial and Resource Implications

No additional.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Any equality, good relations or rural needs assessments would be subject to the Council’s usual screening process.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation.

**Standards and Business Committee –
Draft Terms of Reference**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the development of draft Terms of Reference for a new Standards and Business Committee.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 18th September 2020, agreed to introduce additional arrangements to ensure that the Council, its officers and Elected Members maintain the highest standards of conduct in all that they do. It was agreed that the Council establish a Standards Committee whose main functions would be to promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council and the probity of all the Council’s proceedings.**

- 3.1.2 The role of the Committee will include the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by Members and officers, a commitment to joint working across political groups and between officer and Members, oversight of any training**

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required on all matters relating to standards and conduct, advising the Council on the Code of Conduct for Councillors and oversight of the Members' Register and Declaration of Interests and associated procedures.

3.1.3 The Committee will seek to enhance Member/Officer relations and promote a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities when working collectively in a political environment.

3.1.4 In response to discussions at subsequent Committee meetings and with Party Groups it has been proposed that the new committee may also incorporate responsibility for specific roles in relation to managing some of the business of the Council, including reviewing Standing Orders and a delegated power to receive Notices of Motion. The Committee will operate on the basis of all Party membership but Members will note that this will require a facilitative arrangement with mutual agreement from all parties.

3.2 Standards and Business Committee – Proposed Terms of Reference

3.2.1 The main functions of the proposed Standards and Business Committee would be to promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council; to promote a collaborative working relationship between senior officers and Members; to ensure the probity of all the Council's proceedings; and to review and improve processes in relation to bringing business before the Council, including any review of Standing Orders.

3.2.2 The Committee will have oversight of a Local Resolution Protocol which will deal with 'low level disputes' between Members alleging breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and will aim to restore positive working relationships through mediation.

3.2.3 The Committee will have delegated authority to consider any recommendation by the Monitoring Officer to refer any Councillor to the Local Government Commissioner for Standards in respect of any potential breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors, particularly where the alleged breach relates to a matter which would potentially have a reputational consequence for the Council. In such cases the Monitoring Officer will retain a residual right to refer any matter to the Commissioner for Standards regardless of whether the Standards Committee has endorsed a recommendation from the Monitoring Officer to do so.

3.3.4 A protocol will be developed on how information will be minuted, so that personal information cannot be raised or discussed at Committee or Council meetings.

- 3.3.5 The Committee will also consider any update reports into investigations carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman / Commissioner for Standards.
- 3.3.6 The Standards and Business Committee will also seek to improve processes in relation to bringing business before the council, including referring Notices of Motion and making amendments to Standing Orders. However, it is not proposed that the Committee will have any role in relation to the agenda setting of any other Standing Committee but it will keep under review the overall business brought before the Council.
- 3.3.7 A copy of the draft terms of reference are attached. These are draft Terms of Reference which will be updated based on the detail of the processes to be developed. Any updates will be brought back to the Committee for approval.

3.3 **New Process for Notices of Motion**

It is proposed that:

- In the case of urgent Notices of Motion, the proposer will have the option to take the Notice of Motion either to the Standards and Business Committee or to full Council.
- The Standards and Business Committee will have delegated authority to adopt or reject Notices of Motion. In either case, the Lord Mayor will indicate at Council those Notices of Motion that have been considered by the Standards and Business Committee and whether such Notices of Motion were rejected or adopted. In either case, the proposer only may speak on the issue at Council.
- The Standards and Business Committee will refer all Notices of Motion directly to a standing committee when the matter to which the Notice of Motion refers falls within the remit of that committee. At Council, the Lord Mayor will indicate that the Notice of Motion was received and referred. There will be no speakers on such Notices of Motion at Council.
- The Standards and Business Committee will refer Notices of Motion for consideration by full Council when the Notice of Motion relates to a strategic or constitutional matter.
- The Standards and Business Committee will not have the power to amend the wording of any Notice of Motion that is being referred to full Council for debate.

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- Any amendments to Notice of Motions to be proposed at Council are to be furnished at least one day in advance of going to full Council and will be circulated to Party Group Leaders in advance of the Council meeting.
- In referring any matter to full Council, the Standards and Business Committee may determine to restrict contributions to the debate in relation to any Notice of Motion to one per political party. At Council, the Lord Mayor will clearly indicate if the restriction applies.

The proposed changes required to the Standing Orders would be brought to next months' meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee if this report is approved.

3.4 Next Steps

- 3.4.1** It is proposed that the new Committee, consisting of 20 Members, be constituted at the next AGM in June 2021. A review of the operation of the Committee and its associated processes will be undertaken in six months.
- 3.4.2** The Members have indicated a wish to have all party representation on the Committee. In order to ensure that this will happen, it will need to be mutually agreed, in advance of each new term of office, during the annual selection of remaining places on Committees, that the requisite spaces are reserved for those Parties which do not have a seat automatically allocated on the Committee.
- 3.4.3** It is proposed that amendments to the Standing Orders will be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to provide delegated authority for the new Committee to refer Notices of Motion to Council and to amend the defined timescales for submission and processing of such motions to fit within the monthly meeting cycle.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.5** There will be minor financial implications associated with introducing a new Standing Committee. If the Standards and Business Committee is to meet monthly then it will require an associated Special Responsibility Allowance be allocated to the Chair and Deputy Chair positions of responsibility and funded from the reallocation of the existing Special Responsibility Allowance fund.
- 3.6** The Committee will be serviced by existing resources within Governance and Compliance Services, including Democratic

Services. A budget will be required to cover any associated training and external mediation services.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.7 Any equality, good relations and rural needs assessments implications will be subject to the usual screening processes.

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The draft Terms of Reference for the Standards and Business Committee may include some or all of the following functions:

Standards

- promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected Members and in their working relationship with officers
- a commitment to encourage positive joint working across political groups and between officers and Members and to uphold the high standards of values and behaviours in a relationship of mutual trust
- supporting and facilitating collaborative working between Members and senior officers, particularly to support the consideration of strategic priorities by relevant Committees
- advising the Council on the Code of Conduct for Councillors including any revisions to the Code
- oversight of any training required to train Members and relevant officers on all matters relating to standards and the promotion of the 12 Principles of Conduct in public life, including the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors and any associated training identified by the Committee
- oversight of the Members' Register and Declaration of Interests
- to develop, monitor and review any local protocols required to support the standards regime within the Council
- to ensure adherence to the Local Government Employee and Councillor Working Relationship Protocol
- to consider any minutes of a formal meeting held under Section 5.9 of the Local Government Employee and Councillor Working Relationship Protocol [tbc re GDPR]
- oversight of the Local Resolution Protocol which will deal with "low level disputes" alleging breaches of the Code of Conduct for

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Councillors and is designed to restore positive working relationships through mediation¹

- **consideration of any recommendation by the Monitoring Officer to refer any Councillor to the Local Government Commissioner for Standards in respect of any potential breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors, particularly where the alleged breach relates to a matter which would potentially have a reputational consequence for the Council**
- **the Monitoring Officer will retain a residual right to refer any matter to the Commissioner for Standards regardless of whether the Standards Committee has endorsed a recommendation from the Monitoring Officer to do so**
- **oversight of the procedural requirements of any mediation process put in place to restore internal relationships between Political Parties, Members and/or officers**
- **consideration of update reports into investigations carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman / Commissioner for Standards**
- **oversight of the implementation of recommendations made by the Public Services Ombudsman / Commissioner for Standards**
- **providing recommendations to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in respect of any amendments which need to be made to the Council Constitution in relation to the standards regime within the Council**
- **In respect of any other matter which may require some consideration in the context of standards, acting in an advisory capacity, with reports referred to it either directly by the reporting officer or by another Standing Committee**
- **consideration of agenda items for other Standing Committees which identify standards implications**

Business

- **receiving and reviewing all Notices of Motion and using the Committee's delegated power to recommend either adoption or debate at the next Council meeting**
- **Reviewing Council Standing Orders with a view to making recommendations to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee**

¹ The Local Resolution Protocol will only deal with minor complaints about councillors made by other councillors. The Protocol will not consider complaints made by officers, members of the public or other third parties. The Protocol will not consider complaints made about officers.

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- **initial consideration and review of Council matters that are under internal or external investigation**
- **keeping under review and monitoring the Council's Scheme of Delegation**
- **keeping under review and monitoring the Council's administrative and procedural arrangements in relation to governance"**

Proposal 1

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Heading,

That the Committee agrees, in principle, to establish a Committee, and in advance of that, to set up a time bound working group to enable all Political Parties to work out recommendations on how to proceed. The working group should be facilitated by an external facilitator such as NILGA, if agreeable, and be tasked with producing a report on what Members currently view as the issues needing resolved and putting forward a set of independent recommendations for improvement and/or the remit/role/functions of the Standards and Business Committee.

On a vote, two Members voted for the proposal and seventeen against and it was declared lost.

Proposal 2

Moved by Councillor McAllister,
Seconded by the High Sheriff (Councillor Long),

That the Committee agrees to remove the Business element from the new Committee.

On a vote, six Members voted for the proposal and thirteen against and it was declared lost.

Proposal 3

Moved by Councillor Walsh,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the proposed draft Terms of Reference for the new Standards and Business Committee.

On a recorded vote, thirteen Members voted for the proposal and six against and it was declared carried.

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<u>For 13</u>	<u>Against 6</u>
Councillor Black (Chairperson); Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Carson, Garrett, McLaughlin, Murphy, Pankhurst and Walsh.	The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and Councillors Groogan, Heading, McAllister, McDonough-Brown and McReynolds.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Review of the Belfast Agenda

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is update the Committee on the suggested approach and indicative timeline for a range of consultation and engagement activities to review the Belfast Agenda, where Members will have an opportunity to shape the refreshed Community Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **provide feedback on the stages and proposed consultation and engagement milestones to review the Belfast Agenda; and**
- **note the role that Elected Members will play in refreshing the community plan detailed in section 3.14.**

3.0 Main Report

Duty to Review Community Plan

3.1 Sections 69 and 70 of the Local Government Act 2014 set out the statutory requirements for the review of community plans which must be completed before the fourth anniversary of the date on which the Plan was published. This means that the first review of the Belfast Agenda is required by November 2021.

3.2 Current events and the disruption to normal working arrangements have understandably created a difficulty for community planning partnerships to meet these requirements in the manner initially envisaged. The Department for Communities have therefore written to the Chairs of community planning partnerships, recognising that as part of the ongoing response to

COVID-19, actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, will inform a very large element of any review. The Department considers that this will be sufficient to meet the legislative requirements for Partnerships to formally confirm that a review of the community plan has been conducted.

- 3.3 While not statutory, the link between community plans and the Programme for Government creates practical difficulties as community plans will naturally wish to reflect any substantial change to the PfG Outcomes which may be decided by the Executive. The attached letter also includes a recommendation that Partnerships should therefore consider committing to carrying out a further review before April 2022, to facilitate the timetabling around the PfG.

Additional Drivers for Change

- 3.4 In addition to the legislative requirement to review the community plan, there is an imperative need to revise the areas the city will focus on in the short term to drive recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. As the true effects emerge, we need to ensure our city economy and communities are able to rebuild in the coming months and years.
- 3.5 The Belfast Agenda was influenced by a set of shared values that have shaped its design. As part of its first formal review, we wish to reflect on lessons learned to date. We are driven by values of innovation and a focus on outcomes for people and we will identify what we need to do differently to make the next 4 years a success.
- 3.6 There is a growing literature providing recommendations for community planning including Dr Johann Gallagher's SIB report, 'Towards a Programme of Support for Community Planning in Northern Ireland' and Carnegie UK Trust's recommendation (endorsed by committee in March 2021) following the 'Embedding a Wellbeing Framework in Northern Ireland' project. The review presents an excellent opportunity to embed many of these recommendation into our community planning processes and practices to deliver the required change we want for Belfast.

Defining the scope of the Review

- 3.7 It is important to distinguish between the Belfast Agenda, the overarching city strategy document and the subsequent delivery action plans which identify a range of interventions the Partnership will take to contribute to the overall vision and outcomes. An updated city strategy document will contain the long-term vision and outcomes, population indicators and a new 4-year priority framework the Partnership should focus on.

The Community Planning Partnership (CPP) will undertake a wide range of consultation and engagement activities to ensure the refreshed Plan will include the issues our communities want addressed within this recovery period.

3.8 It is important that new Delivery Action Plans are designed with the public and VCSE sectors (including elements of a bottom-up approach) to ensure communities have greater involvement in the process and together, we can make a meaningful difference to people's lives. The actions will be based on a range of criteria such as:

- Delivery reflects partnership activity providing collaborative gain/not business as usual activity;
- Designed to contribute to the Belfast Agenda outcomes; and
- Include 'area specific' elements making the 'Belfast Agenda' more meaningful to local communities.

Key Principles agreed by the Belfast Community Planning Partnership

3.9 At its meeting on 24th March 2021, the CPP considered initial plans for the review and agreed the following principles:

- The core purpose of the refreshed Belfast Agenda is to improve outcomes for local people.
- The Belfast Agenda should reflect all that is positive about the city and its people, whilst identifying the key challenges that need to be addressed through the work of the Partnership.
- Our approach will be based on the principle of co-design. Statutory partners, Elected Members, Support Partners and the VCSE panel will all have a critical role to play to make this possible.
- The refreshed Belfast Agenda will build on recent work across the city, including the work of Healthy North Belfast, the East Belfast Agenda the STEP project in South Belfast. (Seamless Transition through Education Project).
- Where possible, we will use the data and evidence that partners hold to support and inform our partnership working.
- The work of the CPP will focus on additionality and the collaborative gains that are made possible from our partnership working.

- The review process will involve the participation of all partners, who will need to commit their resources to the review process and the agreed action plans.

Consultation and Engagement Milestones

- 3.10 The CPP agreed to establish a dedicated sub-group from the Statutory Partners and VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel to support the co-design and delivery of the new Belfast Agenda (and corresponding delivery plans) by March 2022. In doing so, it has also proposed to hold a series of consultation and engagement activities organised into stages for which there is a need to reach consensus on various aspects of the Plan. In keeping with the commitment set out within the council's Belfast: Our Recovery framework, the review of the Belfast Agenda will follow a co-design process. Specifically, we are suggesting the Partnership proactively engages communities to identify local challenges, priorities and opportunities. We want co-design to be the central principle for the review process to deliver improved outcomes for people living in Belfast. In summary, the co-design approach we adopt needs to be flexible to reflect the outcome of prior engagement ensuring we listen to and reflect the specific needs of each area of the city.



- 3.11 A Review Launch will aim to raise awareness of the Belfast Agenda and reinvigorate the community planning process with communities. It is assumed that lockdown measures will be in place for the foreseeable future and therefore, the majority of engagement activities will at least initially take place virtually/online. The 'Your Say Belfast' engagement platform will be heavily utilised to make it easier for citizens to engage and have their say. The web-based system will provide a grouped space where all engagement activities will be located and critically where feedback on each stage will also be provided. However, if the situation improves, we will allow for face to face engagement later in the process.
- 3.12 Very similar to the recent Programme for Government (PfG) consultation, we wish to move quickly to agree or reaffirm the long-term vision and outcomes, which were set in 2017, following

extensive engagement. At this stage, we also wish to reach consensus on a four-year priority framework which will identify the specific areas to be progressed by the Partnership. Again, similar to the PfG, this will identify priorities to address Health Inequalities, which may include for example a focus on mental health, emotional wellbeing or Alcohol and Drugs. From recent feedback and political priorities, it is also proposed that zero-carbon should become a 5th pillar of the agenda.

- 3.13 It is vital that we recognise that the Partnership cannot focus on everything and therefore we need to gain consensus on the priority framework before we continue our engagement with an action planning and problem-solving phase. While we expect this stage will be informed by the co-design process, we expect it may take a local-area and/or citywide approach or some combination thereof. This stage will also present an opportunity for both partner organisations, BAPs and the VCSE Panel to present/host sector views or inputs for further in-depth Board consideration and analysis. This stage represents the greatest challenge as we seek to develop draft Delivery Action Plans which can be endorsed by the city and owned by Boards/ partner organisations. Note, it is intended that these plans will remain live documents moving forward being informed by continual engagement.

Role of Elected Members

- 3.14 It is proposed that Elected Members will be engaged at each stage highlighted in section 3.9, through the All Party Working Group on Community Planning. In addition, it is recommended that all elected members will have the opportunity to shape the priority framework and plans for the new 4 year period through Party Group briefings. In addition, Elected Members will also be supported by our Marketing and Communications team who will provide ongoing support via a communications toolkit to enable them to engage their constituents to make their voices heard.
- 3.15 While the specifics regarding engagement events will be finalised with partners, it is expected that there will be a series of thematic and/or local-area virtual workshops. This will provide a further role for elected members to provide a leading role within their communities to shaping the city's future plans.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.16 Any financial implications arising from this report will be covered from existing budgets. The review process will involve the participation of all community planning partners, who will need to

commit their resources to the review process and the agreed action plans.

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

- 3.17 It is recommended that the consultation and engagement activities to review the Belfast Agenda will take account of the draft Audit of Inequalities and include specific sessions with targeted harder to reach groups to ensure that equality implications are considered as part of the review process.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Update on Smart Belfast

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The development of a world class ‘Smart District’ is about harnessing place-based digital innovation to support the city centre’s recovery and the transformation of the wider city.

In particular, the importance of advanced wireless connectivity has been identified to support Belfast’s economic ambition and will form the backbone of the ‘Belfast Smart District’.

- 1.2 The Council has been working with city partners and industry experts to consider how best to prepare a significant proposal to the Belfast Region City Deal’s Infrastructure Enabling Fund that will stimulate investment and the rapid deployment of advanced wireless connectivity.

- 1.3 Following positive responses from key partners, it is proposed that the Council now proceeds to a detailed feasibility study to determine the optimal model for investment.

- 1.4 The paper also provides short updates on two Smart Belfast initiatives:

A request by the Northern Ireland Trusted Research Environment (NITRE) for the Council to participate in a proposed Northern Ireland pilot project to establish a citizen’s panel which will consider issues associated with unlocking health data for innovation; and

Belfast’s success in being selected by the Intelligent Communities Forum as one of 21 ‘Smart Communities of 2021’.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- 1. note the work to date on advanced wireless infrastructure and its importance to the Belfast's economic and transformation/recovery ambitions;**
- 2. approve a feasibility study to determine the optimal model for investment in support of advanced wireless connectivity;**
- 3. approve the Council's role, working with government partners, in the design of a proposed NI citizen's panel to consider issues associated with unlocking health data for innovation; and**
- 4. note Belfast's award of 'Smart 21 Communities' by the Intelligent Communities Forum and its progress to the final of 'Intelligent Community of the Year'.**

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 The Smart Belfast programme was established by the Council to foster collaborative innovation between the public sector, universities, business and the wider community. Over the past three years it has worked with partners to exploit the opportunities of emerging digital technologies such as AI and 5G for positive economic and societal impact. The approach has proven successful and has subsequently informed the content of the Digital pillar of the Belfast Region City Deal and its proposals for a world class Smart District and testbeds programme and Infrastructure Enabling Fund.**
- 3.2 The underlying premise for the Smart District is that the powerful combination of digital technologies, collaborative innovation and place-based development can have a transformative impact on a city's wider economy and future services. A Smart District will not only attract businesses and investment, it can also act as a testbed for innovative solutions to major urban challenges such as mobility, energy, and sustainable neighbourhoods. A well-curated district provides a rich testing ground from planners, policymakers, researchers and innovators. Once proven, successful solutions can then be adopted at scale across a city.**
- 3.3 The proposals for the 'Belfast Smart District' are currently in development and further details will be presented to Members in the coming months.**

- 3.4 Advanced wireless networks (such as 5G) are a foundational technology for our smart district ambition. More broadly, such networks are expected the backbone for urban economies and modern city services. The ideal for any city seeking to stake a claim to digital innovation is to provide an environment in which these wireless technologies are not only deployed quickly – but are done in a fashion that is open and which supports rapid innovation in services.
- 3.5 In June 2020, independent industry expert consultants were commissioned to work with the Council to determine its role in supporting advanced wireless investment. In outline, the study recommended that there is a unique opportunity for city partners to bring physical assets together and to potentially utilise City Deal investment via the Infrastructure Enabling Fund to accelerate the deployment of advanced wireless connectivity. This would offer mobile operators, large or small, easier access to urban assets, and connectivity equipment to greatly reduce barriers to rapid deployment.
- 3.6 The approach would seek to attract co-investment from the private sector. And more broadly support a programme to reduce digital exclusion and grow the conditions for SME innovation, university research, and the deployment of the latest urban services.
- 3.7 A feasibility study and industry engagement programme is now required to build upon the recommendations to validate the finding and to develop a shared value proposition that would form the basis of a substantial business case to the BRCD Infrastructure Enabling Fund.
- 3.8 Members are asked to approve the commissioning of the feasibility study by suppliers with the relevant technical expertise.

Supporting the innovative use of health data in Northern Ireland

- 3.9 Health and Social Care Services were recently tasked by the NI Department for Health to prepare a response for the Health Minister regarding the innovative use of health data. The current legislation in Northern Ireland is quite restrictive in relation to the ‘secondary use’ of health data. The Department is considering changes to the legislation to unlock the more innovative use of data by researchers, clinicians and industry. There are opportunities to enhance diagnostics, therapeutic, medical research and SME growth. Data challenges in relation to the local response to the Covid crisis have helped accelerate this agenda.

- 3.10 As part of this work, the Northern Ireland Trusted Research Environment (NITRE) has approached the Council's City Innovation Office to help gather evidence on the way forward. NITRE is working with health partners on a limited Northern Ireland pilot project which will commence in Spring 2021. The project will establish (in the first instance) a Belfast-focused Public Data Panel. The panel would bring together members of the public to consider the ethical, legal, technical, and economic issues and opportunities surrounding the innovative use of health data. Many of the issues associated with the project are similar to those associated with proposals for a Smart District. The panel will help co-design approaches and want to draw upon the work of the BCC team in relation to the ethical and trusted use of data in the city.
- 3.11 The proposal is still in draft stage, and NITRE are seeking the Council's in principle agreement to contribute to the project. Members are asked to approve the Council's involvement. There is no financial request from the Council.

Intelligent Communities Forum: Smart21 Communities award 2021

- 3.12 Belfast has been selected by the Intelligent Communities Forum² (ICF) as one of 21 cities worldwide to receive the 'Smart 21 Communities' award (alongside cities such as Adelaide, Philadelphia and Moscow). ICF is a global network of cities and regions with a mission to help communities in the digital age find a new path to economic development and community growth.
- 3.13 Following this announcement, ICF will work with us to gather more information about our city. Seven cities will be selected to advance to the 'Top 7 Intelligent Communities' in June with one city being named the 'Intelligent Community of the Year' later in October.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 The estimated cost for a full wireless feasibility study and market engagement exercise is approximately £180,000. This has been identified within the Council's City Deal development budget for 2020/2021.

The Council is being asked to contribute staff team time to the NITRE Data project, particularly from the City Innovation Team's Data Specialist.

² https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/icf_names_the_smart21_communities_of_2021

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

3.15 None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Heritage Trail Sign Policy – City Hall

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th March considered a request to permit the installation of an interpretative interactive sign on a bollard facing the North West lawn at the City Hall.

1.2 There is currently no policy to cover this type of request. Given that there are a number of cultural heritage type projects in development and a focus on community tourism, it was considered that there are likely to be further requests of this nature in the future. Members expressed some concern given the sensitivity of the City Hall as a listed building and were anxious to ensure that its setting and appearance would not be detrimentally impacted, notwithstanding the fact that no listed building consent is required for the installation of such signs. Some concern was expressed in relation to the installation of these signs against the front façade of City Hall, even though they are not attached to the building.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to establish a potential policy regulating the installation of these signs at City Hall and within the curtilage of the grounds.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider the proposed policy and/or make recommendations as it sees fit.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Against the context of the City Hall being a listed building, it is clearly important to ensure that appropriate restrictions are put in place. Multiple signs placed on the bollards would be unlikely to enhance the appearance of the building. If Members were minded to permit the installation of these signs in City Hall grounds, it is recommended that no more than four could be placed on the bollards within the ground to the front of City Hall. It is recommended that they would be all uniform in size and

shape, in the case of the current application 300mm and round. Under no circumstances would such a sign be permitted to be attached to the building. In respect of the east and west sides of the City Hall, it is recommended that no signs would be permitted. However, exceptionally, if an application were to be received related to the content of either of those sides of City Hall, that is the Cenotaph or the Titanic Memorial Gardens, then such an application could be considered but only one at each location.

- 3.2 All other applications for interactive signage, subject to approval, would be accommodated by the provision of an interactive screen at the entrance to the exhibition. In keeping with the EQIA carried out independently for the City Hall grounds, the ambition would be to ensure balanced content and inclusivity. Subject to the content promoted by interactive signage it is a potential means by which some element of rebalancing can be achieved in which a more contemporary image of the City can be portrayed. The content promoted by the interactive signage should have some relationship with the material and themes promoted by the City Hall Visitor Exhibition.
- 3.3 With any permission given to install such signage, the Council would require it to be maintained and would reserve the right to remove it if it became unsightly. It would also reserve the right to remove it in any other exceptional circumstances.
- 3.4 At the Strategic Policy and Resources meeting on 19th March, Members requested information regarding potential interest from others who might wish to have a heritage trail sign at or in City Hall. The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism, has indicated that initial engagement with a number of organisations has demonstrated two separate categories:
 - Existing tours that are guided therefore can incorporate City Hall without having needing physical or digital infrastructure such as Best of Belfast by DC Tours. There is also an audio self-guided walking tour. There is the potential for these to be further enhanced.
 - The second category is largely heritage organisations that have an interest in building on an existing tour or developing a new trail.
- 3.5 While there is a good level of interest, plans are not progressed yet in terms of development and delivery of specific products. This includes:
 - Potential for a heritage trail including City Hall as part of the wider Belfast Jewish Heritage Project. Pre-Covid guided tours had demonstrated a level of interest in such

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a tour with clear connections between Sir Otto Jaffe and City Hall.

- **Ulster Scots Agency are also considering a number of potential heritage trails including Sir Edward Carson.**
- **City Connections with Eastside Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar are working on a visitor passport concept to tell the story of Belfast including the *Journey to Peace*. However, this is in earliest stages of development.**

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.6 There are no financial or resource implications associated with this request save for the installation of an interactive screen.**

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

- 3.7 Any proposals will be subject to equality screening.”**

After discussion, it was

Moved by Alderman Kingston,
Seconded by Councillor Pankhurst,

That the Committee agrees that the Council provide a combined sign for Heritage Trails wishing to associate with the City Hall, and their QR codes, on the external railings of the City Hall. This will be an inclusive approach, accommodating between four and eight trails, and will ensure that the codes are always accessible, including when the City Hall grounds are closed, and avoid cluttering the view of the façade of the City Hall, which is a Grade A listed building.

Amendment

Moved by the High Sheriff (Councillor Long),
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the Heritage Trail Sign Policy, as outlined within the report, subject to the number of signs permissible, which was being suggested as four, being reviewed. The Committee agrees also to initiate a four-week expression of interest exercise to provide any organisation wishing to develop a heritage trail involving the City Hall with an opportunity to apply to have their sign erected.

On a recorded vote, eleven Members voted for the amendment and six against and it was declared carried.

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<u>For 11</u>	<u>Against 6</u>
Councillor Black (Chairperson); The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and Councillors Beattie, Carson, Garrett, Groogan, Heading, McAllister, McLaughlin, McReynolds and Murphy.	Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and Councillors Bunting and Pankhurst.

The amendment was thereupon put to the meeting as the substantive motion when, on a recorded vote, eleven Members voted for and six against and it was declared carried.

<u>For 11</u>	<u>Against 6</u>
Councillor Black (Chairperson); The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and Councillors Beattie, Carson, Garrett, Groogan, Heading, McAllister, McLaughlin, McReynolds and Murphy.	Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and Councillors Bunting and Pankhurst.

James Connolly Heritage Trail Sign

The Committee was reminded that it had, earlier in the meeting, in approving a Heritage Trail Sign Policy, agreed to initiate a four-week expression of interest exercise to provide any organisation wishing to develop a heritage trail involving the City Hall with an opportunity to apply to have their sign erected.

On that basis, the Committee agreed to defer a request from Redhead Exhibition to install an interpretative interactive sign on a bollard facing the North West lawn in the grounds of the City Hall until such time as the expression of interest exercise had concluded.

**Peace Plus 2021-2027 Consultation
(Content/Administration)**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the development of Peace Plus, which is a new cross-border programme that will contribute to a more prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. It will succeed of both the current 2014 -2020 PEACEIV and INTERREG VA Programmes.**
- 1.2 The Council provided a formal response in February 2020 to the consultation on the Peace Plus policy objectives and the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) is currently**

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consulting further on the content and administrative arrangements for the future Peace Plus programme.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to submit for the Committee's consideration the draft Council response to the current consultation being undertaken by SEUPB on the Peace Plus Programme 2021 – 2027.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider/approve:

- The draft consultation response; and
- The draft cover letter providing further information to SEUPB on the opportunities for closer alignment of the Peace Plus Programme with Council and Belfast Agenda strategic ambitions.

3.0 **Main Report**

Background

3.1 SEUPB has recently opened the public consultation phase of the PEACE PLUS Programme (value €1 billion) to seek views on the content and administrative arrangements of the overall PEACE PLUS Programme. The public consultation document published by SEUPB can be accessed [here](#)

3.2 The public consultation opened on 10th March 2021 and the deadline for responses is 12th May 2021. The consultation document has been prepared on the basis of extensive cross Council engagement to ensure the collective strategic ambitions of the Council and the Belfast Agenda have been reflected.

3.3 The PEACE PLUS Programme policy objectives were developed through extensive stakeholder engagement, which took place between December 2019 and February 2020. A total of 16 public events were held across the programme area, with over 1,000 people in attendance. Over 300 survey responses were submitted.

3.4 The overall Peace Plus Programme strategic policy objectives are summarised below (indicative regional budgets have been provided against each theme for information:

Theme 1 – Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities (€210m)
Theme 2 – Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation (€143m)

Theme 3 – Empowering and Investing in Our Young People (€110m)

Theme 4 – Healthy and Inclusive Communities (€155m)

Theme 5 – Supporting a Sustainable and Better Connected Futures (€265m)

Theme 6 – Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration (€47m)

- 3.5 Belfast City Council's history of excellence in delivery of peace and reconciliation programmes, as well as economic and regional development programmes means that the council is uniquely placed to continue to successfully deliver both capital and revenue projects for citizens of Belfast and the region under this forthcoming Peace Plus Programme.
- 3.6 This is further amplified with the opportunities provided by Community Planning to bring statutory partners and communities together as we collectively work towards those ambitions, and in particular, the next stage of developing funding proposals.
- 3.7 The draft consultation response has been circulated for Members' consideration.
- 3.8 Given the restrictive nature of the consultation document prepared by SEUPB (500 character limit at each section), a draft cover letter is also provided for Members consideration. This is to ensure Council is able to ensure all the strategic opportunities for alignment of the Peace Plus Programme with the Council and Belfast Agenda ambitions are clearly articulated to SEUPB, to influence their future direction.
- 3.9 For Members information, PEACE PLUS is a cross-border programme. However, single jurisdiction partnerships (i.e. project partnerships involving organisations from a single country) will continue to be eligible for funding provided they meet the recognised objectives. Projects addressing wider economic and territorial development challenges (as previously funded under INTERREG VA) will need to involve cross-border partnerships and beneficiaries.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 As detailed in the report.

This funding programme will be administered and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body and a competitive application process will operate to access funding.

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

- 3.11 Equality, Good Relations implications and rural needs have been considered at a programme level by SEUPB as the responsible body. Detail is provided in Part 5, Appendix 1, of the Public Consultation document”

After discussion, the Committee approved the draft cover letter and Council response accompanying the report and noted that Political Parties would in due course be briefed on potential Peace Plus projects.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Update on Physical Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme covers 170 current capital projects under 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. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Stage movements on the Capital Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to agree the following movements under the Capital Programme:

- Boodles Dam project (Stage 3 – Committed) proceed to contract award, with a maximum £560,000 budget allocated; and
- Waterfront Hall Escalators project moves to Stage 3 – Committed under the Capital Programme, with a maximum £1.1m budget allocated, subject to contract.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial physical programme under a range of funding streams including the capital programme, BIF and LIF together with the projects which it is delivering on behalf of other agencies including the

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Executive Office, the Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure. There are currently 170 live projects worth in excess of £120m, as well as 100+ early stage uncommitted projects and £300m+ of completed projects which still receive dedicated resourcing effort.

Proposed Movements - Capital Programme

- 3.2 Members 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 agree to the following movements on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage
Boodles Dam Abandonment and Redevelopment	To safely decommission Boodles Dam and develop the site for amenity use (located at Ligoniel Park – off the Ligoniel Road)	Stage 3 – Committed: Proceed to contractor appointment with a maximum budget of £560,000
Waterfront Hall Escalators	Upgrade of the Waterfront Escalators due to operational requirements	Move to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum budget of £1.1m

Boodles Dam Abandonment and Redevelopment

- 3.3 Members will be aware that in September 2019 the Committee agreed to move Boodles Dam to Stage 3 – Committed. It was held at pre-tender stage pending tender return and Planning approval. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has now been achieved and it is recommended that a maximum of £560,000 is now allocated to this project, subject contract. The Director of Finance and Resources has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are also asked to note that Council officers are working closely with the Living With Water Team on project including discussions on a wider project on the Mill Race within the Park.

Waterfront Hall Escalators

- 3.4 Members will be aware that the Waterfront Hall Escalators project was approved at the S P and R Committee meeting in August 2019 as a Stage 1- Emerging project. Members are asked to agree that the Waterfront Hall Escalators is moved through Stage 2 up to Stage 3 – Committed. Any project which is being moved to Stage 3 under the Capital Programme is required as part of the three stage approval process to complete an Outline Business Case. Members are asked to note that this has been completed and reviewed internally. As required by the stage approvals process at Stage 2, a tender exercise has also been carried out and a satisfactory tender has been returned. It is recommended that a maximum of £1.1m is now allocated to this project on this basis. The Director of Finance and Resources has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.5 Financial – the Director of Finance and Resources has confirmed these projects are within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resources – officer time to deliver as required.

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

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Assets Management

The Committee approved the following:

- i. **Land at Village Green**
 - the granting of a licence to the Greater Village Regeneration Trust for the installation of planters and benches at Village Green and their ongoing maintenance for a period of two years;
- ii. **Sally Gardens**
 - the acquisition of c.0.053 acres of land from the Department for Communities; and

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iii. Old Golf Course Road

- the acquisition of c.0.0064 acres of land from the Department for Infrastructure.

Update on Area Working Groups

Subject to the declaration which had been made by Councillor T. Kelly being amended to reflect that her husband was on the Board of Belfast South Community Resources, rather than an employee, the Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the South Belfast Area Working Group of 25th March, including the following recommendations:

- i. **Lagan Gateway Project** – to approve the recommendation on operation and management of the lock and associated areas by the Lagan Navigation Trust and note that recommendations which were made to the People and Communities Committee in April regarding a naming competition for the new bridge and an art piece in partnership with UK Youth for Nature;
- ii. **Sandy Row Tourism Signage Project** – to approve the recommendation that the Council acts as the delivery agent for the Belfast South Community Resources – Sandy Row Tourism signage SOF04 project;
- iii. **Community Capacity Building and Community Infrastructure Needs in Balmoral DEA** – that a mapping exercise on the current provision of community capacity and infrastructure in the Balmoral District Electoral Area, its core functions and gaps in provision, be incorporated into the mapping exercise which had already commenced around community and physical infrastructure provision in South Belfast overall; and
- iv. that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for Justice requesting that the Council be given additional enforcement powers around the seizure of alcohol and noise control, in the context of the opening of the night time economy once the Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Update on Contracts

The Committee approved the public advertisement of tenders, in line with Standing Order 37a, as detailed in table the below:

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Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Management and coordination/referrals of service provision for the Traveller Communities. (fully funded)	Up to 1 year and 5 months	£66,000	S Toland / R Black	To develop and enhance infrastructure that enables a coordinated approach in accessing services and service delivery for the Travelling Community in Belfast.
Design and programme management support for each of the key stages of the Belfast Agenda refresh as agreed by the Belfast Community Planning Partnership	Up to 2 years	£75,000	J Tully	Sections 69 and 70 of the Local Government Act 2014 set out the statutory requirements for the review of community plans which must be completed before the fourth anniversary of the date on which the Plan was published.
2023 Creative Development	Up to 2.5 years	£175,000	A Reid	Seeking external expertise and leadership in the hosting of a large-scale cultural programme in Belfast in 2023.
Telephony software assurance and support	Up to 1 year	£42,474	R Cregan	The corporate telephony solution requires that all devices and users have licensing support in the form of software assurance. This not only provides ongoing support, but also functionality.

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T2085 (b) Provision of a Shared Spaces and Services Volunteer Training PEACE IV Programme Services	Up to 24 months	£124,000	S Toland / R Black	Delivery of volunteer training as part of the Peace IV programme of work - Seeking re approved as duration has increased.
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The Committee agreed that a request to approve the public advertisement of tenders for the hire of minibuses/coaches for Council events and for the provision of taxi services be deferred until its next meeting to enable further information to be provided.

Equality and Good Relations

Revised Dual Language Street Signs Policy

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval for the revised Dual Language Street Signs Policy to reflect the approach agreed by Members which was ratified by the Council in January 2021 for the purposes of issuing for public consultation.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the draft policy, as attached.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

Legislative basis

Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, provides for street naming, street numbering and the provision of street signs. It also gives Councils the discretionary power to erect dual language street signs or secondary nameplates in a language other than English. Article 11(4) requires the Council in deciding whether to exercise its discretion in relation to the erection of a second nameplate, to have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in a street.

3.2 Background to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy

The Council first agreed a Dual Language Street Sign Policy in 1995 but deferred implementation of it to enable resource implications to be agreed. In [1998](#), the Council agreed to implement the policy which provides that only applications supported by a petition of one third of residents of the street will trigger a formal consultation of residents on the street. If two-thirds of the residents of the street respond positively to the consultation, the threshold is deemed to be met for the erection of a second language street sign.

3.3 In [2007](#), the Council agreed a one-year pilot whereby any application submitted through local Elected Representatives be progressed directly to survey stage. In [2008](#) Council agreed to revert to the original policy.

3.4 The policy was incorporated into a new wider Policy on Naming of Streets and Numbering of Buildings which had been drafted to provide clear guidance on the naming of street and numbering of buildings in [2009](#). In [2012](#), the Council reaffirmed the existing policy after considering a number of proposed amendments.

3.5 The policy was subject to a judicial review in 2014 which was successfully defended by the Council (the results of which were reported to committee in [2015](#)). In summary, Mr Justice Horner found that the Council's decision making process was lawful; as a general proposition, international treaties or agreements which have not been incorporated into national laws are not enforceable; and that the Council had a residual discretion within the policy to allow due consideration being given to the particular circumstances of each application.

3.6 Key Issues

New agreed approach

On 7th January 2021, the Council ratified a decision taken by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd October to adopt a new policy position, following a Notice of Motion which was raised in February 2020. Different approaches were proposed. Legal advice was given setting out the need to include certain parameters otherwise some of the proposed approaches would be vulnerable to judicial review such as the need for setting a minimum response threshold and the need to have regard to the consultation response in full, including non-responses even if they are no longer deemed as not being in favour of an application.. The decision made in October was called in and

counsel opinion was sought which found that the decision did not satisfy the following grounds for call-in:

- the procedural grounds on the basis that there was no failure to take into account relevant considerations including resources;
- the disproportionate adverse impact grounds on the basis that the policy when drafted will be subject to equality screening and consultation; and that the operation of residual discretion will allow for appropriate consideration of any potentially sensitive decisions.

3.7 Language Strategy Context

This policy applies to all languages although the majority of applications to date have been for signs in Irish. The revised policy aims to reflect historical international frameworks aimed at protecting and promoting regional and minority languages³ which, while not legally binding until enshrined into domestic law, the UK is a signatory state. These recognise the value of bilingual or trilingual signage as affirmation that the presence of linguistic diversity is appreciated⁴ and as a demonstration of the diverse character of the region⁵.

3.8 The proposed lower thresholds proposed in the policy is based on the level of population thresholds recommended by the guidebook of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues⁶ (emphasis added):

‘Street and locality names and topographical indicators intended for the public are important as markers of social identity, culture and history. A good, practical approach adopted in most countries is for the authorities to provide transparent legislation or procedures to allow bilingual or even trilingual signs, usually following the proportionality principle where there is a sufficient concentration or demand for such signs in minority languages. While national legislation varies, the low threshold where it is considered practicable and reasonable to provide such signs tends to vary between 5 per cent and 20 per cent of the local population, with the lowest threshold usually associated with the use of a minority language that also has some kind of official

³ UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966; UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), 1992; Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), 1994

⁴ [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Third Opinion on the Netherlands](#), 2019, para 116

⁵ [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Fourth Opinion on Croatia](#), 2015, para 66

⁶ [Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation](#), 2017

status or for traditional, historical reasons. The criteria for the display of signs in minority languages must be given a clear and unambiguous legislative basis for it to be effectively implemented. Bilingual or multilingual signs used by public authorities demonstrate inclusiveness, and that various population groups share a locality in harmony and mutual respect.’

- 3.9 In addition, the Committee of Experts who annually audit signatory states on their implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages have made references to the need for lower thresholds in their reports:

‘The Committee of Experts urges the Czech authorities to adopt a flexible approach ensuring the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Charter to all regional or minority languages and to encourage local authorities to apply the Charter where there is a demand, irrespective of any thresholds.’⁷

‘The Committee of Experts notes that limiting the possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages to municipalities where 20% of the population belong to a minority amounts to a territorial reservation which is incompatible with the Charter. Besides, the 20% threshold appears in any case too high, as the number of people justifying protection measures under the Charter is commonly well below this percentage.’⁸

3.10 The Key Changes

The updated policy is attached. The key changes are as follows:

- the trigger for a consultation of the occupiers of a street will be an application to the Council by a resident / residents of the street or an Elected Member representing that District Electoral Area, as opposed to an application from anyone, supported by a petition of 1/3 of occupiers. In order for further consideration as to the erection of a second language street sign to take place, the threshold for the percentage of residents responding positively is 15% instead of 2/3;
- People not returning a reply are no longer deemed not to be in favour of the application;
- Each application will be equality, good relations and rural needs screened;

⁷ [Application of the Charter in Czech Republic ECRML \(2015\) 6](#)

⁸ [Application of the Charter in Poland ECRML \(2011\) 5](#)

- **Members may want to consider whether they will exercise their residual discretion at the point when an application is received and decide as to whether to progress that application to the stage of surveying the street in question or not.**

3.11 Checks and Balances

In the previously agreed report, some key principles were suggested which have been incorporated into the policy:

- 1. That the policy will be used for the promotion of language rights and for the benefit of linguistic communities.**
- 2. That the principles of equality, promoting good relations and respect will underpin the application of the policy in addition to the rights promoted by the policy itself:**
 - **Based on legal advice, each application will be subject to an equality, good relations and rural needs screening.**
 - **The Council retains an overriding residual discretion to take the particular circumstances of each application into account in deciding whether or not a second language street name plate should be erected. In summary, there may be circumstances when notwithstanding the consultation response it may be appropriate to depart from the policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. Guidance will be provided to Members on the factors which should be considered when using this discretion.**
 - **And, as is the case at present, the Council will consider the best approach for any applications relating to long streets.**
- 3. That, as with any statutory consultation which the council is required to undertake, the City Solicitor may intervene if any complaint is made and a basis for that complaint established.**
- 4. That any decision relating to the erection of a second nameplate in the city centre(business core) will, in addition to the current policy considerations, be subject to a wider public consultation to reflect the community of users.**
- 5. That the policy will cover the corporately designated Gaeltacht Quarter until such time as a policy which may contain specific proposals in respect of a bilingual strategy have been adopted.**

3.12 Equality, good relations and rural needs screening of each application

The Council is bound by its duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under its own Equality Scheme to have due regard to the need to the promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to promoting good relations.

The Council's Good Relations Strategy, adopted in 2019, is committed to creating shared spaces. It states (p. 17): 'This Strategy aims to promote sharing over separation and the economic, social and environmental benefits of such. We need to continue to create spaces for communities to interact and make connections with each other, moving from parallel living to meaningful relationships and casual interactions'. Based on legal advice, each application will be subject to an equality, good relations and rural needs screening.

Information gathered during the screening process will be considered by the Committee as part of its residual discretion. The exercise of the Committee's residual discretion will ensure that second language street signs will not be erected in a manner which could undermine Good Relations at a neighbourhood level.

3.13 Public Consultation

A public consultation document is being prepared and will be published on the Engagement HQ platform. The consultation will run for a period of [12/14] weeks and will include a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods of assessing public opinion in order to ensure widespread and meaningful engagement including two remote public meetings. Informal pre-consultation engagement has taken place with the indigenous language community groups namely Foras na Gaeilge, Conradh na Gaeilge and the Ulster Scots Agency. This consultation document will be sent to the other relevant language community groups in Belfast for their feedback. Advice will be sought from Marketing and Communications for communications support due to the high level of interest when this decision was made at Committee.

3.14 Next Steps

The following timetable is proposed:

- April: commission EQIA
- May – Sept: carry out 12/14 week public consultation
- Sept/Oct: update documents based on consideration of consultation responses and prepare consultation report
- Oct: submit final policy to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

3.15 Financial and Resource Implications

- As agreed previously, given the potential for increased numbers of applications the council will deal with no more than 5 in any given month. If numbers are excessive they will be held in a queue and dealt with in the order in which they have been received. This will also be managed in the context of the existing staffing resource and the established annual budget for street signage. A report will be submitted to a future meeting outlining the potential for increasing the number of applications which could be processed on a monthly basis, taking into account the new procedure emanating from the revised policy.
- Screening each application will have resource implications for Building Control, the Place & Economy Policy team, the Good Relations Unit and also the Equality and Diversity Unit.
- The budget for commissioning an EQIA will be covered within existing budgets in Place and Economy. The proposed budget for an EQIA is £6,000 - £8,000. This takes into account a number of supporting workshops and engagement events and the option of including additional equality expertise in the EQIA contract.

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

It is anticipated that the updated policy will be screened in for an EQIA which will be commissioned externally and issued for feedback as part of the public consultation. It is also anticipated that each application for a dual language street name will be screened for equality / good relations / rural needs implications.”

Draft Dual Language Street Signs Policy

1.0 Legislation

The statutory basis for this function is contained within Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 which commenced on 15 March 1995. It provides for street naming, street numbering and the provision of street signs. It also gives Councils the discretionary power to erect dual language street signs or secondary nameplates in a language other than English.

2.0 Introduction

The legislation requires the Council, in deciding whether and how to exercise its discretion to erect a street name in a language other than English, to have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to which the U.K. is a signatory, was taken into account when developing this policy, as was guidance published by the UN Special Rapporteur on the practical implementation of language rights of linguistic minorities. The Council's Language Strategy adopted by the Council in May 2018 sets out the Council's commitment to establish a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city.

The European Charter establishes an obligation on state signatories not to create barriers in respect of the use of a minority language. The UN Special Rapporteur guidance notes that the threshold where it is reasonable and practical to provide such signs varies between 5 percent and 20 percent of the local population. While this policy applies to all languages, the Council recognises that Irish and Ulster Scots are recognised as minority languages in the European Charter.

For the purposes of this policy "Occupiers" shall be taken to be any person whose name appears in the current Electoral Register plus the owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises, but not employees in such premises.

These policy proposals were developed in close consultation with the City Solicitor and are designed to promote consistent and reasonable responses. However, the policy should not be applied in such a way as to prevent due consideration being given to the particular circumstances of each application. See in particular Section 3(xi) below.

Having regard to the significant resource consequences of administering the implications of the policy, the policy will be reactive in nature. The policy will be managed and implemented based on the resources available and the established annual budget for street signage. The Council reserves the right to pause the processing of applications in the event that resources are not sufficient.

3.0 Procedure

The procedures for seeking and assessing the views of Occupiers and the criteria to be applied in deciding whether to erect a street sign in a language other than English are as follows:

- (i) Applications for the erection of a street sign in a language other than English must be made by an Applicant submitting an application form either by post or electronically to Belfast City Council.
- (ii) An application for the erection of a street sign in a language other than English may be made by an 'Applicant' which for purposes of this policy means: (a) an Occupier or Occupiers of the street for which the application is made, (b) an Elected Member of Belfast City Council who represents the District Electoral Area in which the street is located or (c) a developer of a new street. Any application submitted by a developer with regard to a new street will be considered by the Council in accordance with Section 3(xi) of this policy. With regard to streets without any Occupiers, applications for the erection of a street sign in a language other than English may only be made by an Elected Member who represents the District Electoral Area in which the street is located. The Council will have regard to Section 3(xi) of this policy when considering any such application.
- (iii) When an application is received, the Council will canvass by post all Occupiers of that street and seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language. Options for a response will be 'Yes', 'No' and 'No Preference'. The Council will note for its records those Occupiers who do not reply. Reply will be by way of a pre-paid envelope and should be returned within one month of receipt.
- (iv) Each survey that is sent out by the Council to the Occupiers of a street for which an application is made will have a unique identifier number. Survey responses received by the Council for that application will be cross-referenced against that unique identifier and will be recorded. The Council may choose to audit certain responses to surveys. These measures are to provide assurance that each Occupier's view is taken into account.

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- (v) Applications will be dealt with in the order that they are received.**
- (vi) Each application will be subject to a screening on equality, good relations and rural needs. This screening will commence when the application is received and will incorporate the results of the survey completed by the Occupiers.**
- (vii) Where fifteen percent or more of the Occupiers of that street have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign, then such a sign may be erected, subject to the residual discretion of the Council as specified in subsection (xi) below.**
- (viii) If the minimum threshold of fifteen percent is not met, the Applicant will be given two weeks to advise the Council of any special circumstances in relation to the application. If such special circumstances relate to the processing of a survey, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy, in conjunction with the City Solicitor will determine whether such exceptional circumstances exist to refer the matter to Committee. Where exceptional circumstances relate to matters other than the processing of a survey, the matter will be referred to Committee. If there are no special circumstances, the application will end.**
- (ix) A report on all applications (other than those ended in the circumstances specified in subsection (viii) above) will be brought to Committee for a decision.**
- (x) Consideration will to be given to “long streets” where opinion on whether to have a second language street sign may differ between readily identifiable, substantial lengths of the street. In these circumstances, the decision as to the erection of dual language nameplates in certain portions of the street will be made by Committee, exercising its residual discretion and taking into account advice from officers.**
- (xi) The Council will retain a residual discretion to decide to erect or not to erect a street sign in a language other than English in certain circumstances. This will be done on a case by case basis. It may be appropriate to depart from the procedures in this policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. This may include taking into account:**

- (a) the views of the Occupiers of the street;
 - (b) the results of the equality screening for the application, which will include the results of any adverse impact on good relations and rural needs;
 - (c) consideration of the local context of the application;
 - (d) any other Council policies or strategies related to the application and
 - (e) all material considerations relating to the application.
- (xii) When a decision has been taken to erect a street sign in a second language, appropriate arrangements for the translation from English to that second language will be made. The translation will be carried out by an independent, competent body such as the appropriate Language Department at Queen's University or other appropriate, independent and competent institution.
- (xiii) With regard to the design and placing of the street signs the second language sign shall be located immediately below the English sign and the size of lettering shall be smaller than the English version to avoid any risk of confusion to the emergency services.

4.0 Adoption by Council

This policy was adopted by the Council on..... (*date to be left blank until the policy receives Council approval*)”

On a vote, thirteen Members voted in favour of the recommendation to adopt the draft Dual Language Street Signs Policy and six against and it was declared carried.

Language Strategy – Proposed Strategic Approach

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to request approval for a proposed strategic approach for the implementation of the Language Strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to approve the establishment of:

- i. a cross-party, bi-annual / quarterly Member Language Strategy Working Group;**
- ii. a new external Irish Language Forum and a new external Ulster-Scots Forum to add to the existing Council stakeholder fora for the other language communities; and**
- iii. an internal Language Strategy officer working group.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The Council launched its Language Strategy in April 2018, which has two key purposes:

- 1. Indigenous languages: to protect and promote awareness of our indigenous languages: Irish and Ulster-Scots; and**
- 2. Other languages: to promote access to, inclusion of and awareness of other languages: sign languages, the languages of new communities who live in Belfast, and languages and communication for disabled people.**

3.2 The Language Strategy was introduced to reflect:

- 1. To protect and promote awareness of our two indigenous languages:**
 - historical international frameworks aimed at protecting and promoting regional and minority languages⁹ which, while not legally binding until enshrined into domestic law, the UK is a signatory state;**

⁹ UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966; UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966; Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), 1992; Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), 1994

- commitments under the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement 1998 and the St Andrews Agreement 2006;
 - regional strategies and frameworks such as DCAL's Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Strategies in 2015;
 - developments in approach to language issues in Belfast City Council and other councils in NI
2. To promote access to, inclusion of and awareness of other languages
- changing demographics in the city population and the need to promote access to Council services in languages other than English
 - national laws promoting diversity and inclusion.

3.3 Background to the Development of the Language Strategy

The Council first considered the issue of language and the implications of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2002. In 2006, the Council agreed a Language Policy to address legislative obligations based on the needs and priorities of linguistic groups and to act as a guide for Council officers. This policy was subsequently extended in 2007 to cover signage in all Council facilities that "the signs inside Council properties be either pictorial, tactile or in English or a combination of these, but that a multi-lingual Welcome sign be provided where there is appropriate demand".

- 3.4 The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was critical of this decision in its 2010 Briefing Paper on Minority Language Rights, noting that because it stipulates that the name of the facility can be in English only that it "in effect, prohibits the use of Irish in signage on all of the Council facilities". Their view was that the policy generally conflicts with the spirit of and is also incompatible with several articles of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) in particular Article 10 which applies to Administrative authorities and public services.
- 3.5 The Council agreed to review the Language Policy in 2012. In November 2013, a revised Language Policy which incorporated legal advice from a QC to ensure the Council's compliance with all relevant legal obligations was brought through the Party Group Leaders' Forum and Historical Centenaries Working Group however no agreement was reached.

The group recommended at their meeting in October 2012 that the current guidelines should be extended to incorporate Irish versions of the official logo and branding since this would regularise the current position. The Irish version would then be available for use by individual Members and organisations.

3.6 At that time, the demands of Local Government Reform prioritised work streams in that area and consequently the 2006 Language Policy remained in place. In late 2016 a decision was made to revisit the 2006 Language Policy and following refreshed engagement with key stakeholders a draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity was issued for consultation in 2017. This included three draft policies aimed at Irish, Ulster-Scots and other languages which are set out in the Language Strategy document. Following the outcome of the public consultation, in September 2017 Members a set of recommendations including:

- The draft Linguistic Diversity Policy should be re-branded as a Language Strategy, outlining a strategic approach to the development of accessible and inclusive communications;
- Separate strands of work should be established under the strategy, for example – Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language, Sign Language, New Communities' Communications and Language, and Communications and Language Strand for those with a Disability;
- Each strand should be assessed fully to inform appropriate resourcing, for example with dedicated human and material resources that are tailored to the particular needs and priorities of that language community;
- To take forward these recommendations, an action plan should be put in place with immediate effect, setting out a staged approach to full implementation, with resources made available for each strand in order to provide continued momentum to the emerging strategy.

The three draft policies were redefined into specific community needs (see section 3.5 of the Language Strategy) and it was stated “that the development of different policies under the strategy will accommodate the different aspirations and priorities of each language community, balanced through needs and constraints”. Draft aims for each language work strands

were set out. The draft language policies are included in an appendix to the Language Strategy for reference.

- 3.7 The Council has also made some individual decisions in relation to signage such as a welcome sign in Falls Park in 1999; that banners and hoarding in the Gaeltacht Quarter as part of the City Dressing Plan 2012/13 and the Investment Programme in 2012 would be in both Irish and English; and in 2012, it was agreed that the Nollaig Shona (Happy Christmas) sign donated by An Cultúrlann would continue to be erected at the East entrance to the City Hall. More recently, as Members will be aware, the Council has carried out public consultations in relation to leisure centre signage. Members have also agreed an approach to revise the Dual Language Street Signs Policy which is subject to a separate report to this Committee.
- 3.8 The launch of the current Language Strategy was followed by the recruitment of two language officers in September 2018 with the approval of an Action Plan in December 2018 to cover the period up to March 2020. Highlights from this programme of work across all five of the language strands have been circulated. This has included hosting events for Seachtain na Gaeilge/Irish Language Week for schools and schoolchildren; launching a Pocket Guide to Ulster-Scots Place Names in Belfast; signing the British Deaf Association British Sign Language & Irish Sign Language Charter and becoming the first public sector organisation in Northern Ireland to offer SignVideo which allows Sign Language users to contact the council using a live video Sign Language interpreter; developing a 'Valuing Languages' film with Queen's University Belfast showcasing 15 languages used in Belfast today; and developing a dedicated webpage to support people with disabilities to access the Council's services. It should be noted that resourcing issues in the Equality and Diversity Unit, which are now being resolved, has delayed progress in this area.

3.9 **Key Issues**

In order to take forward the further development of the Language Strategy, it is now proposed:

- To establish a political governance structure to enable Members to contribute to and inform the further development and implementation of the Language Strategy;
- To establish two additional external stakeholder fora to enable discussion with and feedback from the language sectors in the city to add to the existing consultation fora for the other language sectors;

- To establish an internal officer working group to ensure a joined up corporate approach on areas related to language such as physical signage, documents translation, website/communications, promotion of heritage and culture;
- To develop an updated action plan for each strand of the Language Strategy including the development of language-related policies and protocols to be considered within the Council's existing budgetary constraints.

It should be noted by Members, that the Council may be facing unprecedented budgetary challenges in the coming years and these actions plans will have to be developed in light of these circumstances.

3.10 Governance

It is proposed that a cross-party Members' Language Strategy Working Group is established to look at language issues and how these are addressed. This group would meet quarterly in the first instance and as required and would comprise one representative from each party. Representatives from different language sectors would be invited to address the group in order to promote understanding of the issues in this area. Direct engagement with the Council's external language stakeholder fora would also be arranged. The Working Group would also receive updates and consider proposals from the Language Officers on their areas of work and would make recommendations on proposed actions plans and policy development. These recommendations would then be referred to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement, as required.

3.11 External Stakeholder Engagement

It is also proposed to establish groups to ensure that the Council can meaningful engage with relevant stakeholders on each strand of the Language Strategy. The Council already has groups relating to Sign Language (Sign Language Users' Forum), New Communities (Migrant Forum) and Disability Communications (Disability Advisory Panel). It is suggested that two new external fora are established for Irish and Ulster Scots. This would ensure there is a mechanism for communities in each language strand to identify and prioritise issues and influence the development of the Council's approach. It would also be an opportunity for the Council to communicate progress on current actions to these

groups. It is envisaged that the two new groups would meet three times a year.

3.12 Internal Corporate Co-ordination

To ensure a corporate joined-up approach the existing Equality and Diversity Network – Operational (or if needed a sub-group established) will be used to share information and co-ordinate work in relation to the Language Strategy. It is suggested this should comprise council officers from across the council including Marketing and Corporate Communications; the Good Relations Unit; Physical Programmes; Heritage, Culture and Arts and the Customer Focus Programme as it relates to matters such as physical signage, translation of documents, use of website/communications, and the promotion of heritage and culture (in particular place names).

**3.13 Public consultation on leisure centre signage
And other language-related queries**

It is suggested that the results of the public consultation on leisure centre signage is considered through this Working Group giving due consideration to the views expressed in the responses to the consultation. This decision was deferred to a later date by Strategic Policy and Resources at the outset of the pandemic. In addition, some physical projects are approaching completion with queries already arising related to requests for English / Irish signage, for example in the new Collin Park, which is funded by Urban Villages and will transfer to the Council following completion; and work on the City Cemetery Refurbishment project which is due to be completed in the autumn. The Council has recently received identical email requests for Irish / English signage in 11 parks reflecting the need to promote a wider understanding of the Council's current agreed policy position in relation to signage in other languages.

3.14 Action Plans 2021-23

Draft action plans for each of the five strands of the Language Strategy will be developed in consultation with members of the external stakeholder groups. It is proposed that these action plans would be considered and agreed by the new Language Strategy Working Group. Any outstanding actions from the previous action plan have been included in the draft new action plans and progress would be reported through the Language Strategy Working Group.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 23rd April, 2021**

3.15 Financial and Resource Implications

This work will be covered by existing budgets.

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

The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations are key principles within which the Language Strategy is delivered. The Language Strategy was subject to the Council's usual screening process."

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

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

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Shared City Partnership held on 12th April, including the following recommendations:

- i. to approve the proposed recruitment process for a Community and Voluntary Representative for East Belfast and agree that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Shared City Partnership, together with the Good Relations Manager, conduct the shortlisting process and subsequent interviews;
- ii. to note that the Committee would be required to endorse the successful applicant, prior to them being appointed;
- iii. noted the indicative timetable for the recruitment process and that interviews might have to be conducted virtually, depending upon the public health regulations in place at that time; and
- iv. noted that the meeting of the Shared City Partnership in May would take the form of a facilitated discussion on addressing sectarianism in the City, with an external facilitator being invited to facilitate the meeting, and that other agenda items would be kept to a minimum.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of the Meeting 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 15th April.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 23rd April, 2021**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Social Value Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Social Value Working Group of 30th March.

**Requests for Use of the City Hall
and the Provision of Hospitality**

The Committee approved the recommendations made in respect of applications received up to 9th April, 2021, as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2021 EVENTS						
Belfast Law Society	September 2021 <i>Dependent on City Hall recovery and COVID guidelines</i>	Centenary Year Celebration Dinner to celebrate achievements and successes and to thank those who have contributed (very largely on a voluntary basis) to the Society's work. Numbers attending – 200 <i>* Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i>	C & D	Yes - £825	No hospitality	Approve Charge £825 No hospitality
Ulster University Business School	April 2022 <i>Dependent on City Hall recovery and COVID guidelines</i>	Gastronomy Summit 2022 Dinner as part of a 3-day conference in Ulster University	B	No – charity	No hospitality	Approve No charge No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
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		Belfast Campus. Numbers attending – 130 <i>* Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i>				
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Chairperson