

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 21st August, 2020

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

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

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

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

Apologies

An apology was reported from Councillor Groogan.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

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

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

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

Finance Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 31st July, an update was provided on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's financial position and a strategy to address the forecast deficit and the mitigation measures which had and would be taken as the situation evolved. It was agreed to continue to provide Members with a monthly update on the financial position and specifically for the August Committee to provide further information on ongoing work in the following areas:

1. Updated forecasts
2. The financial impact of recovery plans
3. The financial impact of the member agreed decision to invoice rents for all tenants from Quarter 2
4. Employee savings arising from the review of vacant posts

The Committee agreed at the July Committee meeting to receive the Quarter 1 financial report in August. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the quarterly finance reports to Committee incorporated both the quarterly financial performance and the year end forecasts. With the requirement for monthly forecast updates as part of the financial strategy agreed with Members in June, the Quarter 1 finance report has been included as an appendix to this report rather than a separate report, providing a comprehensive overview of the overall financial position in one report.

The Committee:

1. noted the contents of the report, including the August forecast update and the attached Quarter 1 finance report at Appendix 1; and
2. agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Minister of Finance seeking a meeting in relation to the Council's rates income for the next 2 years.

Operational Recovery of Council Services

The Committee considered a report in relation to the operational recovery of Council Services. The Chief Executive reported that, while many key services such as Waste Collection and Bereavement Services had maintained a service throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic, the restoration of services, which had been suspended due to lockdown restrictions, are being phased back in despite significant challenges and the requirement for significant modifications. She informed the Committee that 97/120 services were now operational, albeit with some restrictions and that in many cases the operating model had changed given the need to protect staff and maintain social distancing.

She indicated that these controls were likely to be with us for a considerable time and therefore were operating in a new normal way. The changed operating environment was also impacting on our revenue budgets and contributing to the budget deficit we are operating in.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

There were also challenging resource management issues behind the new operating models that had impacts on other services.

The report outlined the guiding principles for recovery and the readiness assessments to restore services in a managed and phased way, as quickly yet safely as possible. The Chief Executive then provided an update on those services which would next re-open, including more public toilets and community centres over the next number of weeks.

The Chief Executive conclude by reviewing the proposals for a phased return of the Council's Working Groups.

The Committee:

- noted the current position, the challenges of recovery of services and the indicative dates for the recovery, albeit in a new norm, of the remaining Council services; and
- approved the phased return over the next number of months of the holding of remote meetings of the Working Groups where decisions were critical as outlined by the Chief Executive.

**Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission
Thinkpiece on Economic Stimulus**

The Committee considered a report which provided a briefing for Members on a 'thinkpiece' from the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission, aimed at making the case for investment in several jobs-led programmes, to drive an inclusive economic recovery.

The Committee noted:

- the report and the intention for the Commission to engage in further discussion at ministerial level; and
- that ongoing discussion between the Commission and elected members would continue on broader areas of an inclusive economic strategy.

Bryson Recycling - Kerbside Recycling Contract

The Committee was reminded that the Council had a contractual arrangement with Bryson Recycling for the provision of a kerbside collection service to approximately 58,000 households in primarily the inner city areas. This service was a weekly collection of segregated, dry recyclables and food waste.

The contract commenced in August 2013, with the initial contract period and subsequent extensions ending in July 2020.

At the Committee meeting on 19th June 2020, officers had requested that a Single Tender Action (STA) be awarded for fifteen months to ensure service continuity until strategic decisions were taken regarding the waste collection and procurement arrangements for this service. The Committee agreed to an STA for six months, with a further report to be brought back to the Committee explaining the implications of this decision and also any changes to

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

the service after such a short timeframe. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report in this regard.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

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

The Committee also noted that a workshop on waste management would be arranged to help inform this piece of work.

Minutes of Meeting of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 14th August, 2020.

Department for Communities COVID-19 Recovery: Revitalisation Fund update

The Committee considered report which provided an update for Members on the status of the Department for Communities (DfC) COVID 19 Recovery: Revitalisation funding; additional detail on the proposed business grants scheme and seeking approval to open the scheme and proposals for an Autumn and Christmas animation programmes and campaign and seeking approval also to proceed with the plans as outlined.

The Committee:

- noted the update on the DfC COVID 19 Recovery: Revitalisation funding;
- approved the process and approach for the business grants strand of the funding; and
- noted the proposals for an Autumn and Christmas animation campaign to run alongside safety enhancements and granted approval to ring fence a proportion of the second tranche of the DfC Revitalisation Fund for this purpose.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion - Suicide Awareness Training

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 1st July, had referred, in accordance with Standing Order 13 (f), the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor M. Kelly and seconded by Councillor Long, to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council recognises the Covid-19 pandemic will exacerbate the current mental health crisis in our City.

The Council previously agreed to work with others to make Belfast a Zero Suicide City to include challenging the taboos of mental health and suicide and ensuring that there is adequate training and resources for all the citizens so that Belfast can react positively to assist those in need.

All of us need to be aware of the signs and understand the questions to ask someone we are worried about and what help they can get. Therefore, Council agrees:

- 1. That Training in mental health and suicide intervention is crucial; therefore Council will investigate resourcing further SafeTALK and Mental Health First Aid training programmes for staff.**
- 2. To appoint mental health champions in each Council Department in to act as a point of contact for an employee who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress, helping the person get appropriate help, and also provide early intervention for someone who may be developing a mental health issue.**
- 3. As a practical first step, to encourage Councillors and staff to undertake a short, free online course in Suicide Awareness training (developed by Mersey Care Foundation Trust and widely used across the NI Health and Social Care Trusts) – this teaches people how to recognise the warning signs and safeguard someone who could be contemplating suicide, talking openly to them and then directing them to appropriate services.”**

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

Motion - Opening our Streets for Everyone

The Committee was advised that the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McKeown and seconded by Councillor Whyte, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration.

“The coronavirus pandemic has shown that there is a real appetite among the people of Belfast to walk and cycle more, which is

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

benefitting their physical and mental wellbeing. This energy and enthusiasm needs to be supported so it can be sustained.

While potentially transformative work is being undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure to install pop-up cycle lanes, pedestrianise streets and widen footpaths, there is a significant opportunity for Belfast City Council also to play its role in the recovery and the enhancement of our city by taking the car out of many of our streets.

The Council therefore agrees that a programme of temporary road closures be rolled out across the city on specific days, such as at weekends, in consultation with local communities, disability organisations and businesses. This will help in the recovery – socially, economically and environmentally – by making room for people to get around in a socially-distanced way, affording local businesses extra space to operate more safely, and supporting the move towards reduced car use and a cleaner, greener, healthier city for all.

To facilitate this in a managed way, the Area Working Groups will be reconvened remotely at the earliest opportunity to help identify potential sites in each part of the city. Any closures must not adversely impact residents, businesses, or people with a disability or accessibility issues. Closures must also take account of public and road safety.”

The Committee agreed that a report on the contents of the motion be brought to the Committee, highlighting how some the work outlined was being undertaken as part of the city recovery programme.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

**Inclusive Growth - Update on the Development
of the City Charter and Inclusive Growth Network
Launch Event**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 In March 2020 the council’s commitments to Inclusive Growth document was published. One key commitment was the development and implementation of an Inclusive Growth City Charter for Belfast. Since then a cross council team led by Strategy, Policy and Partnerships has been progressing the development of this charter. The purpose of this paper is to provide a short update on progress to date and proposed key activities going forward.

1.2 In addition we would like to inform Elected Members that the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

Councillor Christina Black and the Deputy Chair, Councillor Sarah Bunting, have been extended an invitation to attend the virtual launch event of the Inclusive Growth Network (IGN), of which Belfast City Council is a member, on Thursday 17 September from 3-4pm.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the progress to date in relation to the development of the charter and agree to an elected members workshop / engagement following the initial developmental stages.
- b) Note the proposed key stages of work going forward to shape the council's future ambitions with regard to the development and implementation of a city charter for Belfast.
- c) Note the proposed attendance of the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at the IGN virtual launch event.

3.0 Main report

Inclusive Growth City Charter

3.1 Members will be aware that in 2019 they tasked officers with the production of a cross council 'strategy' to reflect their growing ambitions in relation to inclusive growth. The result of this process was the production of the councils 'Commitment to Inclusive Growth'. This document sets out a clearly defined list of ambitions and linked actions as to how the council, in its capacity as a corporate body and as a city leader, will deliver against its commitment in the next two years.

3.2 The document contained commitments that Belfast City Council would progress over the next two years, including the development of an Inclusive Growth City Charter for employers across the city – setting a city wide standard in relation to procurement, employment and civic / neighbourhood engagement.

Inclusive Growth City Charter Working Group

3.3 An initial employer workshop was held in partnership with Allstate NI in Jan 2020, with over 70 employers from a wide range of sectors represented. It was agreed that a small working group would be convened with broad representation from this group, to help council shape and co-design the charter (nominees were received but the work was paused until May 2020 due to COVID).

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

- 3.4 The first working group virtual meeting was held on 21 July 2020 with almost all members in attendance. The meeting aims and outcomes were to:**
- **Bring working group members together to co-design the charter**
 - **Discuss and test emerging ideas, building on the January workshop, to scope the charter**
 - **Agree the purpose and role of the working group**
 - **Agree high level actions and responsibilities for the next 3 months**
- 3.5 Initial feedback from the working group was very positive in terms of support for the charter. They felt that that given the unfolding COVID-19 crisis and the significant impact on the economy, the charter could be an opportunity to demonstrate a collective commitment to an inclusive recovery, creating a stronger, more resilient, and fairer city economy and society. The need to be ambitious in our thinking and to work in collaboration were highlighted as key design principles going forward.**
- 3.6 This work is being completed in partnership with officers from Place and Economy and Finance and Resources to ensure the charter, when developed, fully reflects corporate priorities and ambition associated with, amongst other things, employment, procurement, young people and skills progression.**

Proposed Next Steps

- 3.7 Over the coming months the cross council team will complete the following steps:**
- **Draft scoping note – draw up an initial scoping document (reflecting members ambitions and best practice from elsewhere) of a what a charter for Belfast could potentially look like by end August 2020.**

This scoping document will set out in draft form options of, what the charter could be, who it's for, it's principles, focus, and suggestions as to how it could be developed and implemented for Belfast. This document will be used to guide the discussions as part of our further engagement with stakeholders.

- **Extensive engagement – engage with wide range of stakeholders to co-design the charter and seek their views on its design, during September to November 2020.**

We recognise that for us to achieve our aim of a fit for purpose charter that is for all of Belfast and not just a council initiative,

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

we must ensure our engagement is broad and has appropriate representation from key sectors. This stage is vital if we are to design a charter that that will meet the collective aspirations of the working group of being ambitious and making a tangible difference to the lives of citizens.

We will carry out meaningful engagement with a range of stakeholders including anchor institutions and other employers; community and voluntary sector; other public sector partners; communities; trade unions; those individuals that the strategy would focus on supporting (i.e. our four target groups) and representative bodies.

We have identified the purpose of the engagement as:

- Helping businesses and organisations understand what inclusive growth and a charter are;**
- Testing the emerging ideas in the scoping note to co-develop and refine the Inclusive Growth City Charter;**
- Achieving buy-in and ownership of the Inclusive Growth City Charter;**
- Encouraging early adopters of the Inclusive Growth City Charter.**

We will use the feedback already gathered from the consultation on the Inclusive Growth Commitments to inform our discussions and we will ensure we engage with those hard to reach groups who often face additional barriers to economic growth eg. those with a disability, those with dependants, those from a migrant community.

We will also carry out engagement through the strong sectoral partnership relationships in Place & Economy and will drive development of the structure through the Community Planning Partnership.

- Members Workshop – following the above we will host a development workshop with elected members. (December 2020)**

Following our engagement we will summarise key findings and refine key principles and areas of focus to arrive at a final draft charter, including how it should be implemented and monitored.

- Public consultation - Hold a focused public consultation on the draft charter.**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

We will carry out a focused public consultation on the draft charter using our on-line platform and some further focused sessions and make any final changes/amendments

- Charter launch - Plan pilot and launch of the charter.

We will design a delivery plan and materials and agree a communications strategy and identify partners to launch the charter and carry out a pilot.

Inclusive Growth Network

- 3.8 The purpose of the IGN is to support areas at the forefront of the inclusive growth agenda with the practical evidence, knowledge and expertise to advance local ambitions for more inclusive, green and sustainable economies. The IGN is hosted by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

As an IGN member Belfast has access to a facilitated peer network and a package of support designed to inform and advance our local activity. Other IGN member organisations include Barking and Dagenham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool City Region, North Ayrshire, North of Tyne, Sheffield City Region and West Midlands.

IGN Launch Event – Thursday 17 September, 3pm- 4pm

- 3.9 The Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, Councillor Christina Black and the Deputy Chair, Councillor Sarah Bunting, have been invited to attend a closed online roundtable discussion on Thursday 17 September from 3-4pm. Confirmed speakers include Lord Jim O'Neill and Meghan Harte, Director of LISC in Chicago and former Deputy Chief of Staff to Mayor Rahm Emmanuel.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 There are no additional financial or resource implications.

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

- 3.11 As agreed within the initial Inclusive Growth Commitments equality screening, a separate screening will be undertaken as part of the draft charter design process. The findings from the initial screening are already being utilised to inform the engagement design and content.”

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Partnership Panel

The Committee was advised that The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provided for the establishment of the Partnership Panel for NI. The Act provided also for all Executive Ministers (including Junior Ministers) to be members of the Partnership Panel. Local government representation on the Panel comprises one nominated elected Member from each of the 11 councils (designated as a position of responsibility), with Belfast City council being represented by Councillor McAteer, and cross-party representation from NILGA.

The Partnership Panel provided a structured, political relationship between central and local government, creating opportunities for innovative working between Ministers and Councillors, and the formation of joint policies which will ultimately improve co-ordination and help deliver better outcomes for local people. It had not met since 2016.

Minister Ní Chuilín has indicated that reconvening the Partnership Panel would provide an opportunity to discuss how we could continue to work together for the benefit of everyone, particularly in the social and economic recovery from Covid-19. It would provide an opportunity to consider joint policy design on key issues of public concern and improve coordination between departments and councils.

It was therefore anticipated that the next meeting of the Panel would explore how both tiers of government could continue to work together in leading recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Recognising the importance of the financial and organisational sustainability of local government for progressing this recovery within their local areas and communities. The meeting would also be asked to agree Standing Orders and Terms of Reference for the Partnership Panel.

As a position of responsibility, Councillor McAteer's role would be to provide a corporate voice for the Council, alongside working with other local government representatives to promote wider local government sector positions, on key areas which require closer engagement and action from relevant Executive Ministers and their departments.

Councillor McAteer would be supported in this role by officers in the Strategic Hub. Briefings would be provided reflecting the current priorities of the Council and the wider local government sector through continued involvement and engagement with local government bodies such as SOLACE NI and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA). It was understood that agenda items for the September Meeting of the Panel would include Finance, Recovery Plan and City Deals.

The Committee agreed:

- a) that proposed agenda items for Partnership Panel meetings be reported through the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, or to the Party Group Leaders Forum when committee timings were not viable to ensure political oversight; and
- b) that, in future, the minutes and outcomes of the Partnership Panel be reported back to the Committee for information and consideration.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

Invitation to join COP26 UK Mayors Advisory Council

The Committee was informed that Glasgow would be hosting the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) at the Scottish Event Campus (SEC) on 1st till 12th November, 2021. The climate talks would be the biggest international summit the UK had ever hosted, bringing together over 30,000 delegates, including heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change.

The COP26 President Designate and UK Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma, had written to invite the Lord Mayor, or appropriate nominee, to join the COP26 UK Mayors Advisory Council. The group would meet quarterly and would be focused on the COP campaigns, communications and events in the lead-up to, and at, COP26; including engagement with all communities and sectors across the UK as part of the goal to make this an 'All of Society' COP.

Fully committed to the principles of the UN, the COP26 would focus on promoting tangible action that brings to life the transformational change required to unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement with key ambitions including: phase out coal power by 2025; pledge to net zero emissions by 2050; and speed up the transition to low emission vehicles.

The Secretary of State Alok Sharma had held meetings in Belfast during the week commencing 10th August and, during meetings with Belfast City Council and city partners (the Belfast Climate Commission), had stressed the importance of city involvement in preparation for COP. He restated his encouragement that Belfast would play an active role in a UK Mayors Advisory Council.

The Committee approved Belfast City Council's membership of the Mayors Advisory Council, and agreed that the Lord Mayor represents the Council, with the Chairperson of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to deputise if required.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Assets Management

The Committee approved:

I. Brooke Drive NIE Substation – Lease

the disposal of c. 0.007 acres of land. along with a cable easement and right of way, at Brooke Drive to Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) Networks Ltd for the purposes of an electricity substation. Disposal to be by way of a 950 year lease from 1 January 2020, subject to a premium of £2,350.

II. Cromac Street, Station Street and Kent Street Car Parks – Licence Agreements

a new one year licence for Cromac Street Car Park from Northern Ireland Housing Executive from 1 April 2020 and a new fee structure for payment of licence fees due under a current licence at Kent Street car park and the terms

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

already agreed for a new licence at Station Street Car Park, both of which are held from the Department for Communities.

III. Blanchflower Playing Fields - Lease of land for an NIE Networks sub-station

the lease to NIE Networks Ltd of c.29.45 square metres of land at Blanchflower Playing Fields for a term of 99 years from the date of the agreement at a peppercorn rent of £1 per annum. The Lease would also grant NIE Networks a right of way to carry out installation, repairs and maintenance works at the sub-station.

**Provision of temporary office accommodation –
Community Rescue Service**

The Committee was advised that the Community Rescue Service was a charitable search and rescue organisation operated by volunteers from communities across Northern Ireland. They operated from an office in Apollo Road but had been notified by their landlord that their premises had to be vacated as it was ear marked for new development by a commercial partner.

The Council had been able to identify suitable premises which the Community Rescue Service could use on a temporary basis. This would be under a license arrangement for up to 3 months initially but with discretion on the part of the Council to extend on a month to month basis.

Officers from the Estates Unit, Facilities Management and Legal Services had been working on the identification of premises in Dunbar Link, which was currently the Council's Disaster Recovery Suite. The Emergency Planning Team would obviously take priority if that suite was required by the Council. The suite is located on the second floor and offers two large offices, kitchen and toilet facilities. In addition, the Cleansing dinette on the 1st floor would be used one night per week as a training facility for the 54 volunteers. A closed garage had been identified at the Charlotte Street Cleansing depot for secure parking, plus a small office would be available for the community rescue team within the depot. Their three additional vehicles would use three spaces in the neighbouring Belfast City Council car park on Ormeau Avenue (on Apsley Street) on a temporary basis, however, priority would be given to Council staff if they were required in the future.

Legal Services would draw up a licence which would need consent from the Department for Communities as it represented a technical disposal at a nil rent if the Council was minded to approve this arrangement.

This would allow the Community Rescue Service to continue to provide a service while they sourced permanent office accommodation.

The Committee agreed that temporary accommodation be provided to the Community Rescue Service as set out.

Finance, Resources and Procurement

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

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

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

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary to Committee of the key issues that have been considered and discussed by the Panel during the 2019/20 financial year, the assurances received and the areas requiring attention. This report also summarises the process by which the year-end reports are to be considered by the members of the Audit and Risk Panel.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel during 2019/20 as set out at Section 3 below.
- Note the process by which the year-end reports are to be considered by members of the Audit and Risk Panel.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel in 2019/20

3.1 During 2019/20, the Panel met four times (including a training session at Belfast Castle). The Audit and Risk Panel did not meet in June 2019, following the elections in May, as the composition of the Panel had to be agreed by Strategic Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee on 21st June and ratified by Council on 1st July, with nominations to the Panel sought from each of the eight parties thereafter.

3.2 In the absence of an Audit and Risk Panel and in order to ensure that there was proper consideration of the year-end papers, the

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

Audit Assurance Board met on 3rd June 2019 to review these reports. In addition, an annual report was submitted to SP&R committee in June 2019 providing a summary of the key issues that had been considered and discussed by the Panel during the 2018/19 financial year, the assurances received and the areas requiring attention.

3.3 During 2019/20, the Panel has considered audit plans and issues arising from audit activity, such as the findings, assurance levels and recommendations arising from audit work and the progress being made to implement audit recommendations. It also received regular updates on:

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

3.4 The key assurances that the Panel has received on are as follows:

- the Council's financial statements and annual governance statement 2018/19, as prepared by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources and his team; this provided a management assurance on the Council's financial position
- the audited accounts and the associated external audit annual letters for 2018/19 (providing an opinion on the accounts) and report to those charged with governance (setting out control issues arising from the annual external audit), as prepared and presented by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. This provided an external assurance on the Council's financial position for 2018/19. (The accounts for 2019/20 are in the process of being prepared for the new deadline of 31 August 2020)
- NIAO assurance on the Council's performance management arrangements, specifically in reference to the Improvement Duty placed upon the Council by relevant legislation. The NIAO's audit of this area provided an unqualified opinion

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

- the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance arrangements, based on the findings of audit work completed throughout the year.
- 3.5 Where areas for improvement have been identified, these have been reported and implementation of agreed recommendations is actively monitored and reported back to the Panel. The Panel has, on occasions, raised issues where either audit reports have identified significant issues or progress against recommendations has not been satisfactory, with Directors asked, where necessary, to attend the Panel and provide further explanation. The key areas considered during 2019/20 have included waste collection, safeguarding, IT asset management, IT project management, budgetary control and financial reporting, organisational culture and the implementation of the new HR / payroll system.
- 3.6 The Audit and Risk Panel have also received updates during the year on the Council's risk management arrangements, including reports on the management of the Council's key corporate risks.

June 2020 meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel / year-end reports

- 3.7 In line with the changes to the Councils decision making processes in response to the impact of Covid-19 and related to this, the extension of the deadline for preparation of the financial accounts to 31st August 2020, the usual meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel in June 2020 did not take place. However the usual reports, including the draft Annual Governance Statement and other important year-end papers, were considered by the Audit Assurance Board on 28th July 2020 and circulated to Audit and Risk Panel members for review, comment and agreement during August 2020. Subsequently a request was received to convene a meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel to discuss these year-end papers. This will be going ahead with a virtual meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel that was originally scheduled for 8th September. In line with usual protocol, the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel meeting would be presented to the following Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.8 None.

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

- 3.9 None.”

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a as detailed in Table 1
- Approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Table 2

Table 1 – Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	Senior Responsible Officer	Short description of goods/ services
Tender for the procurement of laptops and docking stations	Up to 8 months	£200,000	R Cregan	Laptops and docking stations to facilitate homeworking
Replacement Financial System (T2051)	Up to 10 years	£3.5m - £800K upfront Capital; £300K per annum	R Cregan	Procurement of a new corporate financial system
Provision of a Roma Support Project PEACE IV Programme Services (T2111)	Up to 20 months	£169,676	N Grimshaw	Delivery of a project to support the Roma and settled community as part of the Peace IV programme of work
Tender for the provision of delivery of events as part of Wider Work plan Peace IV Programme Services(T2018)	Up to 2 years	£80,000	N Grimshaw	Delivery of events as part of the Peace IV programme of work Seeking re approved as value has increased
Provision of a Shared Spaces and Services Volunteer Training PEACE IV Programme Services (T2085)	Up to 18 months	£124,000	N Grimshaw	Delivery of volunteer training as part of the Peace IV programme of work Seeking re approved as duration has increased

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

Provision of 'Shared History, Heritage and Identity Content / Narratives for Interpretative Panels on Shared Space Greenway' PEACE IV Programme Services (T2084)	Up to 19 months	£80,000	N Grimshaw	Delivery of interpretative panels on Shared Space Greenway as part of the Peace IV programme of work Seeking re approved as duration has increased
Music Strategy	Up to 10 months	£60,000	A Reid	Music strategy and implementation plan to feed in to Council's application for UNESCO City of Music 2021
Virtual server licensing	Up to 3 years	£47,877	R Cregan	Licensing and support for the council's virtual server infrastructure
Uninterruptible power supply (UPS) equipment	Up to 1 year	£134,354	R Cregan	Uninterruptible power supply (UPS) equipment across the BCC IT estate
Corporate digital backup environment	Up to 1 year	£88,838	R Cregan	Implementation of a new corporate backup environment

Table 2- Direct Award Contracts (Single Tender Action)

Title of Tender	Supplier	Total Value
Supply and Delivery of Fruit and Vegetables to Belfast Zoo (T1498)	Arnott's Fruit Limited and First4fruit	£35,000
Supply of Alcohol based sanitiser	Antrim Supplier trading as Workwear	£47,850

Equality and Good Relations

Equality and Rural Needs Screening Outcome Q1

The Committee noted the contents of the Equality and Rural Needs Screening Outcome Quarter 1 report.

Dual Language Street Signs Policy

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to consider the Notice of Motion in relation to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Consider the Notice of Motion in relation to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy.
- If Members are minded to adopt the policy position as set out in the notice of motion, you are asked to consider a minimum response threshold in respect of the survey requirement.
- Following discussions at Party Group Leader’s Consultative Forum a protocol for managing engagement with consultees will be developed for consideration by members at a subsequent meeting.
- In the event that Members wish to adopt an alternative threshold to the current policy position of 2/3 supporting as being the trigger for erecting a second name plate, it is open to Members to do this.
- If Members are minded to change the policy, a revised policy will be drafted in accordance with your decision and presented for adoption with an equality screening carried out. Committee to note that other revisions could be made to the current policy to address issues which have arisen since it was first adopted, for example new streets or streets which have no occupiers, and accordingly these revisions could be incorporated within any new policy should you choose to adopt one.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

The Council adopted a Street Naming and Buildings Numbering Policy in February 2009 which incorporates a Dual Language Street Signs Policy. At Council on 3 February 2020, Councillor Walsh proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“This Council has one of the most restrictive policies of any council in the North in regards to Irish Language Street Signage Policy.

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020

Currently, the policy is that you need a 1/3rd of the eligible electorate in a street to sign a petition which starts the process. Once the process has been initiated, a letter is sent to everyone in that street who is on the electoral register asking if they consent to have bilingual signage installed. The resident has three options, namely, Yes, No and Don't Care. For the process to come to a successful conclusion, 2/3rds of the total electorate in the street need to consent to yes. If a letter is not returned, it is considered by the Council as saying that they don't consent for the bilingual signage. Furthermore, where residents send the survey back saying 'Don't Care, this is also considered to be a negative response.

If we, as Elected Members were held to the same standard as this policy in the Local Government elections, not one Member would have been returned to serve on this Council, as we would not have met those restrictive parameters. The Council's Language Strategy refers to increasing the visibility of the Irish Language in our City. However, it is essential not to impose the Irish language on residents if the majority of them in a street do not consent to it.

Therefore, this Council will amend its Irish language street signage policy to the following:

- i. continue with the 1/3rd of the eligible electorate in the street to initiate the process;*
- ii. change the policy to reflect that it will be the majority of respondents to the survey that will decide if the process has been successful. Therefore, it will be 50% +1 of respondents that will determine if the petition to erect bilingual signage has been successful. Non-respondents will not be considered as a negative response; and*
- iii. those respondents who respond as 'Don't Care' are not considered to be a negative response and will be treated as a void vote."*

The motion was seconded by Councillor McLaughlin. In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the People and Communities Committee.

Key Issues

- 3.2 The motion sets out a proposal to move from the current arrangements ($\frac{1}{3}$ expressing an interest by petition and $\frac{2}{3}$ indicating a preference in a subsequent survey to erect a dual language street sign) to a simple majority of respondents. The

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

proposal would mean that non-respondents are not considered in the context of any final decision on dual street naming. The proposal retains the current trigger through a petition to initiate the process. Given that no minimum response threshold is established Members may wish to consider that if you support the motion to change the current policy, whether a minimum threshold of those on the electoral register responding should be met through the survey before the matter is referred to committees for consideration. For example that the respondents to the survey would equate to a minimum of $\frac{1}{3}$ (or such other figure as you may agree) to those on the electoral register in that street.

- 3.3 Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995 requires the Council to take into account the views of the occupiers in a street.
- 3.4 The current Council policy was subject to a legal challenge which was successfully defended. A copy of the judgement is attached for information. This does not affect the ability of the Council to adopt a different policy should it choose to do so.
- 3.5 Some political concern has been expressed as to how the process is undertaken in terms of engagement relating to the consultation required to inform the decision. A protocol to sit alongside the policy could establish principles underpinning that process. The rationale for this approach, in terms of the political view expressed, is to ensure the integrity of the process.
- 3.6 Conradh na Gaeilge obtained and provided the briefing attached at Appendix 2. This suggests that in the context of treaty obligations, specifically the European Charter for Minority Languages, that the suggested minimum response threshold could be construed as unreasonable in that it operates as a barrier to the erection of a name plate in another language. It suggests that this could be unlawful as being contrary to treaty obligations.
- 3.7 Counsel's opinion has been obtained and is attached at Appendix 3. The opinion confirms that a 50+1 rule for responses, ignoring non-responses is likely to be susceptible to legal challenge, particularly in cases where there is a very low response to the consultation. It further confirms that the adoption of a minimum response threshold for the consultation, mirroring the trigger required through the petition ($\frac{1}{3}$ of residents) addresses any potential legal frailty in the context of the formal requirements of the 1995 Order. Counsel is also of the opinion that establishing such a threshold is not contrary to treaty obligations. The opinion recommends all decisions in

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

which the response threshold is not met are referred to Committee for consideration to address any special or particular circumstances that might arise.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.8 Any change to the policy to the extent suggested is likely to result in a greater number of applications and a greater number of signs to be erected.**

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

- 3.9 This change of policy will need to be equality screened.”**

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees that Belfast City Council will install bilingual signage in all of its streets, subject to the occupants in each street (who are on the electoral register) being contacted by the means of a letter survey and if the threshold of 33% is returned and 50% plus 1 are in opposition to the plans then the signage will not be installed.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor McDonough-Brown,

That the Committee agrees that the policy be amended to provide that 10% of residents in any given street would initiate the process, with at least 50% plus one of the people in the street being in favour to erect a second street sign.

On a vote by show of hands, four Members voted for the amendment and fifteen against and it was declared lost.

The original proposal sanding in the name of Councillor Beattie was put to the meeting, when nine Members voted for and ten against and it was declared lost.

The Committee agreed that a further report on the Dual Language Street Signs Policy be submitted to the Party Group Leaders Forum.

Operational Issues

Use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality

The Committee approved the recommendations made in respect of applications received up to 7th August, 2020 as set out below:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 21st August, 2020**

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2021 EVENTS						
Malaysia Students Society of Northern Ireland	6 March 2021	<p>Malaysian Night 2020 – Annual cultural celebration and dinner for the Malaysian community in Belfast.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 300</p> <p><i>Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i></p>	C&D	No (Charity)	No Hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Video and web streaming of Council Committee meetings - Councillor McReynolds

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor McReynolds addressed the Committee in relation to the video recording and web streaming of Council Committee meetings.

The Committee agreed, in principle, to keep in place the current procedure (or a similar alternative) of the live web streaming of Council Committee meetings after the city emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, with a report on how this could be undertaken and associated costs being submitted to a future meeting.

Lighting up City Hall for World Suicide Awareness Day on 10th September - Councillor Long

At the request of Councillor Long, the Committee agreed to the lighting up of the City Hall on 10th September to mark World Suicide Awareness Day.

Chairperson