



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL
ON MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor M Brady (Vice Chair)
- Committee Members (In person)** : Aldermen – J McGrath and S Ross
: Councillors – S Cosgrove, P Dunlop, R Lynch, H Magill, T McGrann, V McWilliam, M Ní Chonghaile and A O’Lone
- Committee Members (remotely)** : Councillors – J Burbank, M Stewart and S Wilson (Chair)
- Non-Committee Members (In person)** : Councillors – N Kelly, B Webb
- Non-Committee Member (Remotely)** : Alderman – M Magill
Councillors – M Cooper and L O’Hagan
- Officers Present** : Chief Executive – R Baker
Director of Community Development – U Fay
Head of Community Development – R McKenna
Head of Arts, Culture, Tourism & Events – S Goldrick
Head of Corporate Affairs – J McIntyre
ICT Systems Support Officer – C Bell
PA to Mayor and Deputy Mayor – S Fisher

CHAIRPERSON’S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed Members to the September meeting of the Community Development Committee and reminded all present of the audio recording procedures.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor – J Gilmour

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 3.2 – Councillor P Dunlop

Item 3.18 – Councillor P Dunlop

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 CP/CD/476 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANT AID PROGRAMME SMALL GRANTS FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS 2025/26

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval in relation to the Community Development Small Grant Programme funding awards being recommended.

2. Background

The Small Grants Programme provided financial assistance to groups within the Borough of up to £1,000 towards seeding costs, public and employer's liability insurance, small items of equipment or an activity.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Small Grants Programme was approved by the Council in October 2014 as part of the Council's Community Development Grant Aid Programme.

Members were advised that groups who apply for a small grant were not permitted to apply for any other funding available under the wider Community Development Grant Aid Programme during the course of the 2025/26 financial year.

In December 2019 Members agreed that from 1 April 2020 all Small Grants be assessed on the basis of Pass/Fail against eligibility criteria and not subjected to a scored assessment process. All proposed awards were subject to a signed disclosure from the group confirming that all appropriate supporting documentation was in place and could be provided on request or the offer of funding would be withdrawn.

4. Financial implication

Members were reminded that the total budget for the 2025/26 Community Development Small Grant Aid Programme was £15,000 within the 2025/26 Community Development budgets.

Between June and August 2025, 9 applications were received and assessed by Officers, with 5 applications totalling £4,877.10 recommended for approval, details of which were circulated for Members' information.

5. Summary

It was proposed to award 5 Small Grants totalling £4877.10 to the successful applicants as outlined.

Community Development Small Grants would remain open as a rolling programme with applications being reported to the Community Development Committee on a quarterly basis.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

the 5 Small Grant applications requesting a total of £4,877.10 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jonathan Henderson, Community Services Co-ordinator

3.2 **CMOD/CD/007 SENIORS CHRISTMAS EVENT GRANT AID RECOMMENDATIONS 2025**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval in relation to the Seniors Christmas Event Grant funding recommendations 2025.

2. Background

As part of its Community Development Grant Aid Programme the Council operates a Seniors Christmas Event Grant to support local senior's activities taking place in the Borough over the Christmas period. This can include the provision of Christmas Dinners, Tea Dances or other Christmas Celebration Events.

Applications from community organisations, churches and friends of fold organisations were eligible. The grant call opened for applications on 15 July and closed on 12 August 2025.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

Members were reminded that it was approved at the October 2019 Community Planning and Regeneration Committee, that the annual opportunity for Senior Citizens Groups in Antrim to apply for funding to run Christmas events be extended to fund legacy Newtownabbey Senior Citizens Groups.

Members were reminded that 94 Senior Christmas Event Fund applications totalling £46,219 were approved at the September 2024 Community Development Committee.

Modifications to the Grant guidance notes for 2025 were approved at the June 2025 Community Development Committee.

4. Financial Implication

Members were reminded that the total budget available for the Seniors Christmas Event Fund in 2025/26 was £55,000 within in the Community Development budgets.

In total 106 applications were received and assessed by a panel of officers, with 103 applications totalling £50,645 recommended for approval, subject to the receipt of all relevant supporting documentation.

A detailed summary of the applications was circulated for Members consideration.

5. Section 75 Equality Screening

Members were advised that a Section 75 Equality Screening exercise, Rural Proofing and Data Processing Impact Assessment had been carried out in relation to the Grant Funding Policy.

6. Summary

The Seniors Christmas Event Fund opened for applications on 15 July 2025 and closed on 12 August 2025. It was proposed to award 103 Seniors Christmas Event Fund grants to the successful applicants as outlined, at a cost of £50,645 provision for which exists within the Community Development budget for 2025/26.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

the 103 Seniors Christmas Event Grants requesting a total of £50,645 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jonathan Henderson, Community Services Co-ordinator

3.3 **CP/PP/012 PEACEPLUS PROGRAMME**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members regarding the elements of the PEACEPLUS Action Plan due to be delivered by the Good Relations Section over the next three years including the Project Plan.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that the PEACEPLUS Programme is a €1.1bn cross-border funding programme created to strengthen peace and prosperity within and between the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

PEACEPLUS was the successor programme to both Peace IV and INTERREG VA. The Council was one of 17 Peace Partnerships across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

Members were reminded that the aim of Theme 1 'Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities', was to unite communities and help them rebuild and learn from a difficult past. Under Theme 1 and Investment Area 1.1 'Co-designed Local Community Action Plans', local councils across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties were invited to submit applications to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to secure funding to deliver against the actions identified in each Local Community Action Plan.

The Council had secured £4.4m to deliver programmes and projects in the Borough until December 2028. Delivery of the Antrim and Newtownabbey PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan was managed by the Community Development Directorate within Council.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that it was reported to the February 2025 Community Development Committee that Council had received a Letter of Offer from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) offering €5,103,757 (approx. £4.4m) towards delivery of the Council's Co-designed PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan.

4. Key Issues

Within the Local Community Action Plan, Programme 8, 'Our Inclusive Borough' was to be delivered by the Good Relations Section. A copy of the Delivery Plan was circulated for Members' information.

This programme would consist of five individual programme elements designed to educate, promote respect, tolerance and understanding to embed community cohesion as follows:

1. Cultural Expressions
2. 'You're Welcome'
3. Perspectives
4. Storytelling
5. Cultural Colours Festival

The key objectives of the overall programme included:

- Promotion of respect and acceptance for all cultural identities.
- To bridge the gap between local and newcomer communities to recognise the vital role all cultures play in fostering a diverse inclusive community.
- Support for participants to engage in and advance peace, bringing divided communities together.

The Key Outputs/Outcomes of the programme included:

- A minimum of 1830 participants to take part in the programme.

- Delivery of a programme that provides a minimum of 12 hours of meaningful contact on a cross-community basis for core participants, and 3 hours of meaningful contact for events participants.

The next steps in the process were:

- Procurement of programme delivery partners which would be led by the Council's Procurement Manager in line with the Council's Financial Regulations and SEUPB PEACEPLUS Programme Rules. Opportunities would be advertised and/or signposted on eSourcingNI, eTendersNI and eTendersIE to attract a wide pool of potential suppliers.
- Establishment of a Service Level Agreement between the PEACEPLUS Partnership and the Good Relations Section.
- Establishment of monthly departmental working groups; and
- Commencement of programme delivery.

5. Financial Implication

The budget for the Programme 8: 'Our Inclusive Borough' element of the Action Plan is €420,000.00 (£365,217.40) and would be based on real-life costs for staff costs, office and administration, external expertise and services and equipment.

There is no additional financial contribution required from Council.

6. Governance

The 'Our Inclusive Borough' programme elements would be managed and delivered by the Good Relations Section via a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the PEACEPLUS Partnership and regular performance reports would be brought to the PEACEPLUS Partnership and the Community Development Committee.

7. Summary

The Community Development Directorate were leading on the delivery of Programme 8: 'Our Inclusive Borough' of the Council's PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan, with a total budget of €420,000.00 (£365,217.40).

An SLA would be established with the PEACEPLUS Partnership and regular updates would be submitted to the PEACEPLUS Partnership and Community Development Committee.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath

Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

(a) the update on the PEACEPLUS Programme 8: 'Our Inclusive Borough' be noted;

(b) The delivery of the programme by the Good Relations Section through a Service Level Agreement with the PEACEPLUS Partnership be approved.

ACTION BY: Amy Gribbon, Good Relations Officer

3.4 CP/CP/113 BARNARDO'S - THE THRIVE PROJECT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the provision of an additional £3,000 financial assistance for the 2025/26 Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Education Authority (EA) on behalf of the THRIVE Project and provide Members with the THRIVE 2025/2026 Q1 Performance Report.

2. Introduction

The THRIVE Project was a collaboration of local parents, schools, community and voluntary organisations and statutory agencies working together to help children and young people in Macedon and Threemilewater DEAs to achieve their full potential and had the best start in life.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded it was agreed at the March 2025 Community Development Committee, to provide £25,000 financial assistance for the 2025/26 Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Education Authority on behalf of the THRIVE Project with a quarterly performance report brought to future meetings of the Committee.

Members were also reminded that the 2024/25 Quarter 4 Performance Report was approved the May 2025 Community Development Committee and was based upon performance measures in the Service Level Agreement.

4. Financial Position

It was agreed at the March 2025 Community Development Committee to provide £25,000 in financial assistance to THRIVE for 2025/26 subject to a quarterly performance report being provided.

Members were advised that correspondence, which was circulated, had been received from the THRIVE Board requesting provision of £3,000 uplift in financial assistance from the Council to THRIVE for 2025/26.

The Board had indicated increased inflationary costs over the last number of years as well as recent government changes to employer NIC contributions, affecting both staffing and overhead costs. Officers had identified provision of £3,000 through underspend in other areas of the approved 2025/26 Community Development budget.

5. Governance

It was approved at the June 2025 Community Development Committee that the Head of Community Development replace the Elected Members

nominated to serve on the THRiVE Project Board from both the Macedon DEA and the Threemilewater DEA with immediate effect.

Officers continued to work with the THRiVE Project and Community Planning partners to manage the performance of the Project. Quarterly performance reports would continue to be reported to the Community Development Committee.

Members were reminded that a presentation on the THRiVE Project was made to the October 2024 Community Development Committee.

6. Summary

A request had been received from the THRiVE Board requesting provision of an additional £3,000 financial assistance for the 2025/26 Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Education Authority (EA) on behalf of the THRiVE Project.

The Quarter 1 Report was circulated for Members' information and was based upon performance measures in the Service Level Agreement. Officers had been advised that Quarter 1 targets had been met.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove

Seconded by Alderman McGrath and agreed that

(a) the provision of an additional £3,000 financial assistance for the 2025/26 Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Education Authority on behalf of the THRiVE Project be approved.

(b) the THRiVE Project Quarter 1 2025-26 performance report be approved.

ACTION BY: Will McDowell, DEA Engagement Coordinator

3.5 CP/CD/482 BONFIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the delivery of the Bonfire Management Programme in 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

The Council operated a Bonfire Management Programme which sought to achieve the following key objectives in relation to bonfire sites and family fun events:

- To work with and support local communities to bring about improvements in bonfire management, particularly in terms of inclusivity, safety and increased family atmosphere.
- To further reduce the adverse health and environmental impacts of bonfires including the illegal disposal of waste.

The Programme, in the longer term, aimed to:

- Reduce the use of flags, images and effigies.
- Promote wider cultural links throughout the Borough.
- Tackle sectarianism, racism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice.

3. Previous Decision of Council

At the Community Planning and Regeneration Committee in May 2018 the Equality Screening for the Bonfire Management Programme 2018 was approved. As the programme had not changed significantly since this time this outcome remains valid.

The 2025 Bonfire Management Programme including aspects of governance and funding conditions and an estimated budget of £171,000 was approved at the February 2025 Committee meeting. An update on the delivery of the Bonfire Management Programme in 2024 was noted at the September 2024 Committee meeting.

4. Bonfire Management Programme 2025

The programme was approved by the Committee in March and groups were asked to sign up to the programme by 4 April 2025. A total of 23 sites signed up to participate in the programme, details of which were circulated for Members' information.

Interagency site inspections to sites with a traditional bonfire were undertaken by community officers and statutory partners from the agreed collection date of 16 May 2025 up until 11 July 2025.

The Chief Executive was in attendance at all site inspections on 11 July 2025. Details regarding the condition of traditional bonfire sites upon inspection including photographs were circulated for Members information.

As part of the multiagency partnership approach to bonfires, PSNI Neighbourhood Officers were routinely on site for planned bonfires and the following incidents involving burning of flags, which constitute hate crimes, had been reported.

Bonfire Location	Designated BMP Site	Signed up to BMP 2025	Incident Details
Rathcoole - Doonbeg	Yes	Yes	3 x Irish National Flags
Rathcoole – Rathmullan Drive	Yes	Yes	1 x EU Flag
Randalstown – Neillsbrook	Yes	Yes	Yes – 2 x Irish National Flags
Antrim - Ballycraigy	Yes	Yes	1 x Four Irish Provinces Flag

Of the 23 designated sites signed up to the 2025 Bonfire Management programme, the PSNI Neighbourhood Officers reported that four bonfires burnt flags, which is identified as a hate crime.

In spite of this, the programme continued to meet its longer-term aim of reducing the use of flags, images and effigies.

Within the current approved programme, the Terms and Conditions state in relation to such incidents that:

Groups should refrain from erecting/displaying racist, sectarian or paramilitary paraphernalia such as flags, emblems, effigies on or in the vicinity of the Bonfire Site, or on or in the vicinity of any activities associated with this Programme.

In terms of non-compliance the programme, within this section, stated that:

- *Each Group will undertake to ensure that the associated Bonfire Site complies with the Terms and Conditions of this Programme. Bonfire Sites that had breached any of the Terms and Conditions will be given 3 days to address the issue. If the Group addresses the issue, then no further action from the Council will be taken.*
- *Failure to comply with the Terms and Conditions may result in a reduction in funding applied either within the current year or the following year as appropriate. The level of reduction will be determined by the Council on a case-by-case basis.*

Members' instructions in relation to the four flag burning incidents were requested.

Family Fun Events

Each site participating in the Bonfire Management Programme was supported by the Council through the organisation by Officers, in collaboration with group representatives, of family fun events to the value of £3,500 per event. These events were usually held on 11 July in the vicinity of the bonfire site and typically included inflatables, sports activities, face painting, games and hospitality. The Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chief Executive attended a number of the events in 2025. The groups do not receive any funding directly from the Council and Officers procured all goods and services on their behalf from a list of approved suppliers.

Asbestos Removal

Members were advised that it was reported to Council Officers by a contractor, who was in attendance at Neillsbrook Bonfire site to support the post-bonfire clean-up of the sand and paving stone base, that they observed what they believed to be asbestos within the bonfire remains. This was reported to the Waste Management Section who progressed the matter urgently. Subsequently testing confirmed that this was asbestos and urgent removal was arranged.

Members were advised that whilst this is 'fly-tipping', it also constituted a non-compliance under the terms of the approved programme, specifically the following condition:

Collection and/or burning of tyres and other toxic material and health and safety considerations; Where tyres and/or other toxic materials appear on a Bonfire Site and are not removed within 3-day notification period or where recommended clearance space is not achieved the following will apply:

Key Target	Potential Reduction
<i>Tyres and toxic materials should not be collected or burnt on the bonfire and materials should be restricted to wood. However, the Council reserves the right to intervene in exceptional non-compliance situations by increasing the level of reduction or suspending financial assistance.</i>	20% up to £700

It was proposed that the Neillsbrook bonfire site would have its funding for 2026 reduced by a minimum of £700 given that the asbestos located at this site constitutes a toxic material and non-compliance with the condition detailed above which specified a minimum reduction of 20%.

5. Financial Position

It was reported to the Committee in February that the programme would cost £171,000. Members were advised that £50,000 was subsequently received from NIHE reducing the net cost to the Council for the Bonfire Management Programme to £121,000.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

As part of the Council's responsibilities to identify and address potential implications and promote equality of opportunity and good relations, as required by the Northern Ireland Act 1988, the Bonfire Management Programme had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an EQIA. At the Community Planning and Regeneration Committee in May 2018, the Equality Screening for the Bonfire Management Programme 2018 was approved. As the programme had not changed significantly since this time, this outcome remains valid.

7. Governance

In total 4 bonfire sites were identified as having flag burning incidents at them, and therefore found to be in non-compliance with clause 11 of the programme terms and conditions.

The programme states that 'Failure to comply with the Terms and Conditions may result in a reduction in funding applied either within the current year or

the following year as appropriate. The level of reduction would be determined by the Council on a case-by-case basis.'

It was not possible to take any action in the current year given the funding arrangements, where Council Officers procure all services on behalf of the group in advance of the events and had therefore provided full funding for 2025. Members' instructions in relation to a financial penalty for 2026 were requested.

In relation to the discovery of asbestos at the Neillsbrook bonfire site, which represented non-compliance in terms of toxic materials being burnt, it was proposed that funding was reduced to this site in 2026 by a minimum of 20% or £700 as per the approved Bonfire Management Programme.

8. Bonfire Management Programme Review 2026

The existing arrangements where Council Officers managed the delivery of all funding and family fun event organisation associated with the Bonfire Management Programme is hugely resource intensive. In addition, it doesn't create any opportunity for groups to develop their capacity to manage their own funding and delivery of their own event. Officers were also aware that groups could often access much more competitive rates for services than the Council given their community and voluntary status.

It was therefore proposed to review the current arrangements including the Bonfire Management Programme and funding model and bring back a proposal to a future meeting of the Committee, which would include the potential for the phased development of a Bonfire Event Grant Funding Programme. With this approach, groups would be asked to make an application for funding as with other grant programmes and be able to organise and deliver their family fun events independently

Community Officers would continue to support, guide and assist groups to build their capacity whilst taking on this greater responsibility. As with all grant programmes successful receipt of full funding would require compliance with the programme's terms and conditions.

9. Summary

A formal evaluation of the programme would take place with Members, statutory partners and site representatives on Thursday 25 September 2025.

Whilst the programme had achieved significant improvements since its inception, there were still a small number of sites where hate crime incidents were occurring through flag burning. In addition, asbestos was found to have been placed on the Neillsbrook bonfire.

The programme had been in its existence in its current form since 2016. There was an opportunity to review the programme and create a Bonfire Event Grant Programme, which both considerably reduced resource pressures on

the Community Team and also built capacity within the groups and wider community.

A report on the review of the 2025 Bonfire Management Programme and proposals for the 2026 programme would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Magill that

- (a) due to the final inspections having been carried out, no sanctions are applied to the four sites where flag burning incidents occurred
- (b) due to the final inspections having been carried out, no sanctions are applied to the Neillsbrook bonfire site regarding the presence of asbestos
- (c) that the current programme remains in place.

AMENDMENT

Proposed by Councillor O'Lone
Seconded by Councillor McGrann

- (a) that a penalty of 20% or £700 be applied in 2026 to each of the four sites where flag burning incidents occurred
- (b) a funding reduction of a minimum 20% or £700 be applied in 2026 to the Neillsbrook bonfire site given the presence of asbestos;
- (c) a review of the current programme including funding arrangements will be carried out, with proposals brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

On the Amendment being put to the meeting, Members voted 7 in favour and 6 against.

The Amendment was declared carried and became the substantive proposal.

The substantive proposal was then put to the meeting and 7 Members voted in favour and 6 against and it was agreed that:

- (a) that a penalty of 20% or £700 be applied in 2026 to each of the four sites where flag burning incidents occurred
- (b) a funding reduction of a minimum 20% or £700 be applied in 2026 to the Neillsbrook bonfire site given the presence of asbestos;
- (c) a review of the current programme including funding arrangements will be carried out, with proposals brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

Amended at full Council on 29 September 2025 as follows:

Moved by Councillor Brady
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove that

- (a) due to the final inspection carried out, no sanction be applied in relation to the four sites where flag burning incidents occurred**
- (b) due to the final inspection carried out, no sanctions be applied in 2026 to the Neillsbrook bonfire site given the presence of asbestos;**
- (c) the current programme remains in place.**

ACTION BY: Ursula Fay, Director of Community Development

3.6 CP/CP/224 CONSULTATION ON THE SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR INDEPENDENT ADVICE AND DEBT SERVICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to inform Members about the consultation on the Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services.

2. Introduction/Background

The Department for Communities (DfC) had developed draft proposals for a Support Framework for independent Advice and Debt providers to ensure that people could access consistent quality advice regardless of where they live in Northern Ireland, with a focus on ensuring that the Department's investment:

- supports independent Advice and Debt service-providers to meet needs on the ground;
- strikes the right balance between supporting frontline community delivery and regional services; and
- supports collaboration and joining up of services to minimise duplication, maximise resources and improve outcomes for clients.

The proposals were underpinned by 'Guiding Principles' that were a reference framework for how services should be delivered.

For the purposes of this consultation independent advice and debt services refers to the Department funded community-based advice and regulated debt advice services. It did not include specialist Housing Advice delivered by Housing Rights.

3. Key Issues

DfC had set out proposals for a new Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services in Northern Ireland.

The Framework highlighted the essential role that Advice services play in empowering people, tackling poverty, and improving wellbeing. The consultation seeks views on how best to deliver consistent, high-quality advice across all communities, ensuring services are sustainable, accessible, and effective.

The Framework proposed a future model based on collaboration between DfC, district councils, and advice providers, underpinned by guiding principles such as impartiality, independence, quality, accessibility, and being free to users. It recognised growing demand for advice, particularly around welfare reform, debt, cost-of-living pressures, and changing demographics.

Current challenges included fragmented funding, duplication of services, inconsistent reporting, and short-term financial arrangements, all of which the new framework sought to address.

Five investment themes were identified:

1. **Joining up services** – creating better referral pathways and collaborative partnerships to deliver holistic support.
2. **Enhancing visibility and accessibility** – including a new regional gateway for advice, multi-channel access, and continued support for debt helplines.
3. **Quality and innovation** – implementing a strengthened quality standard (NIAQS) and supporting innovation in service delivery.
4. **Measuring performance and impact** – introducing consistent outcomes-based reporting to demonstrate effectiveness and value for money.
5. **Supporting and strengthening the sector** – providing integrated regional infrastructure support, capacity building, IT investment, and a stronger collective voice for the sector.

To implement the framework, the Department proposed a phased approach: developing outcomes and quality standards, piloting and refining service models, and then commissioning services. Longer-term funding commitments and a new Regional Advice Forum would support stability, collaboration, and sector-wide effectiveness.

The consultation opened on 11 August 2025 and closed on 3 November 2025. The DfC wished to hear from a wide range of interested persons and organisations. The consultation documents and associated survey were available online via [Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#)

Members were advised that they may wish to respond on a corporate, individual or party-political basis.

4. Summary

The Department for Communities (DfC) had launched a consultation on draft proposals to support the delivery of Independent Advice and Debt Services in Northern Ireland. The consultation opened on 11 August 2025 and closed on

3 November 2025. Full details and documentation could be accessed via the Department's website.

Members were advised that they may wish to respond on a corporate, individual or party-political basis.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

Members respond on a party political or individual basis.

ACTION BY: Conor Cunning, DEA Engagement Manager

3.7 CP/PCSP/143 CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO CRIMINALISE SEXUALLY EXPLICIT DEEPPFAKE IMAGES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' instructions in relation to the Department for Justice consultation on proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images.

2. Introduction/Background

The Department for Justice (DOJ) were undertaking a consultation and were seeking the views on proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images within the Justice Bill.

The proposals on which views were sought related to:

- Legislation to criminalise the creation of a sexually explicit deepfake image
- The creation of sexually explicit deepfake images being hybrid offences
- The inclusion of the element of recklessness within the offences
- Legislation to criminalise sharing sexually explicit deepfake image
- The inclusion of motivation in these offences
- The setting of penalties for offences

3. Key Issues

Members were advised correspondence, which was circulated, had been received from DOJ advising of a consultation on sexually explicit deepfake images seeking views on proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images for inclusion within the Justice Bill.

The DOJ wished to hear from a wide range of interested persons and organisations. The consultation documents and associated survey were available online via the Departments website. The consultation opened on 22nd July 2025 and closed on 6th October 2025.

Members were advised that they may wish to respond on a corporate, individual or party-political basis.

4. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

The DOJ advised that the proposals being consulted upon had been subjected to an Equality Impact Screening. There had been no equality issues identified, and the equality screening had not identified any Section 75 impacts at this stage. The completed equality screening document was available at the DOJ website.

5. Summary

The DOJ had launched a consultation on proposals to criminalise sexually explicit deepfake images. Input was welcomed from all interested parties. The consultation closed on 6th October 2025. Full details and documentation could be accessed via the Department's website.

Members were advised that they may wish to respond on a corporate, individual or party-political basis.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath

Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

Members respond on a party political or individual basis.

ACTION BY: Stef Buchanan, Community Development Manager

3.8 COMD/GR/002 GOOD RELATIONS GRANT AID PROGRAMME 2025-26

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval in relation to the Good Relations Grants Funding Programme awards being recommended.

2. Background

The Good Relations Grant Programme provided financial assistance to groups within the Borough of up to £2,000 towards activities, events and programmes that align with the aims of the Council's Good Relations Action Plan.

The Good Relations Grant Programme opened for applications on 1 April 2025 and closed on 31 December 2025.

All Good Relations Grants were assessed against eligibility criteria and a scored assessment process. Applicants were required to score a minimum of 60% for an application to be recommended for approval.

3. Previous Decisions by Council

The Good Relations Grant Programme, was approved at May 2025 Community Development Committee as part of the Council's revised Good Relations Action Plan 2025-26.

4. Key Issues

During the months of April -July 2025 4 applications were received and assessed by Officers, with 1 successful application totalling £2,000 recommended for approval. The project details were circulated for Members' information.

All proposed awards were subject to a signed disclosure from the group confirming that all appropriate supporting documentation was in place and could be provided on request or the offer of funding would be withdrawn.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Members were reminded that the total budget for the 2025/26 Good Relations Grant Programme within the 2025/26 Community Development budget was £5,000.

6. Summary

It was proposed that the Good Relations funding award for £2,000 to the successful applicant as outlined.

Good Relations Grants 2025/26 would remain open until 31 December 2025.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Alderman McGrath and agreed that

the Good Relations Grant application requesting £2,000 be approved.

ACTION BY: Amy Gribbon, Good Relations Officer

3.9 AC/GEN/018 LIGHT UP CIVIC BUILDINGS POLICY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval on the updated Light Up Civic Buildings Policy.

2. Background and Introduction

The Council has a policy in relation to the lighting up of civic buildings on special occasions, significant dates and in response to requests from a range of organisations to support causes and campaigns. The Policy was developed by an all-party Working Group of Elected Members established in 2019, who play an ongoing role in relation to the operation of the Policy.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

In July 2019, the Council agreed to form an all-party Working Group to develop a policy of lighting the main Council civic buildings. The Light Up Civic Buildings Policy developed by the working group was approved by the Council in 2020.

It was agreed that a review of the Policy would be brought to the June 2021 Community Planning Committee when a revised Policy was approved and it was also agreed to carry out further reviews annually.

At the September 2024 meeting of the Community Development Committee an updated Light Up Civic Buildings Policy was approved with a further review to be carried out in June 2025.

4. Annual Policy Review

The annual review of the Policy by the Working Group was carried out in June 2025 and the following changes were agreed:

- An annual light up blue for International Men's Day on 19 November to be added to the Council's Annual Schedule of Light Ups and
- An annual light up purple in late November to support the Women's Aid 16 Days of Action Campaign Against Domestic Violence to be added to the Council's Annual Schedule of Light Ups

Details of all of the light ups carried out in the previous year, April 2024 to March 2025, were circulated for Members' information, as well as the updated Policy.

5. Finance

The light up of civic buildings was carried out at minimal cost and a review of energy costs associated with this activity identified that this activity had a negligible impact.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

In accordance with the Council's Equality Scheme, this policy had been screened for the need to carry out a full equality impact assessment (EQIA). A full EQIA was not recommended.

7. Governance

At the start of the Council term in 2023, membership of the all-party Light Up Civic Buildings Working Group was updated for the full term as follows:

- DUP Alderman Stephen Ross
- Sinn Fein Councillor Rosie Kinnear
- Alliance Alderman Lewis Boyle

- UUP Councillor Leah Kirkpatrick

This Working Group continued to have oversight of the Policy and carry out the role as identified in Section 4.5 of the Policy. A further review of the Policy would be carried out in June 2026.

8. Summary

The Council had a Light Up Civic Buildings all-party Working Group established in 2019 and a Light Up Civic Buildings Policy, which was first approved in 2020. The Policy was reviewed on an annual basis and any updates brought to Committee for approval. Following review of the Policy in June 2025 an updated Policy was recommended for approval with a further review to be carried out in June 2026.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the updated Light Up Civic Buildings Policy be approved with a further review to be carried out in June 2026.

ACTION BY: Ursula Fay, Director of Community Development

3.10 AC/GEN/113 VIBE ARTS PARTNERSHIP

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval to allow VIBE Arts to use the Old Courthouse Theatre free of charge every Wednesday to provide theatre facilities to adults with additional needs.

2. Introduction/Background

VIBE Arts is a not-for-profit disability arts organisation working in the Antrim area that aims to offer inclusive, high-quality creative opportunities that build confidence, foster self-expression and promote community connection. The organisation received approximately £30,000 each year from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to help deliver a comprehensive art and drama programme for 15 adult service users for 47 weeks per year. This funding covered only some of the costs of this programme.

In May 2025 VIBE Arts used the Old Courthouse for two rehearsals and a public performance which was attended by the former Mayor and which provided a professional and inclusive space for adults with learning disabilities to devise and present their own original work.

3. Request for Council support

VIBE Arts had met with Council Officers to discuss the possibility of using the Old Courthouse on a regular basis for drama classes / rehearsals and two annual performances. They would like to use the facility free of charge every

Wednesday between 9.30am and 3.30pm, and also use the theatre free of charge for a public performance every Spring and Autumn.

4. Financial Implication

Should this proposal be approved, officers would ensure that VIBE Arts staff received appropriate health and safety training to allow them to use the facility for classes and rehearsals without supervision so that Council staff costs would not be incurred.

The hours of access that VIBE Arts had requested would not interfere with commercial evening bookings, and VIBE Arts understand that any existing Council booking (eg senior citizens' tea dances) would take precedence.

As part of the Arts and Culture Pricing Schedule the theatre could be booked at the community rate of £45 per hour. Assuming that VIBE Arts used the facility every Wednesday for six hours across a 47-week year plus two performances, this would equate to £13,290 in potential revenue. In reality, the theatre was rarely booked for use during daytime hours, and any loss of potential revenue would be considered to be minimal.

5. Summary

VIBE Arts, a not-for-profit disability arts organisation working in the Antrim area, has requested the use of the Old Courthouse Theatre free of charge every Wednesday for drama classes and rehearsals, with two evening performances every year.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the proposal to allow VIBE Arts to use the Old Courthouse Theatre free of charge every Wednesday to provide theatre facilities to adults with additional needs be approved.

ACTION BY: Simon Goldrick, Head of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Events

3.11 AC/GEN/010 BOROUGH ARTS AND CULTURAL ADVISORY PANEL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the minutes of the Borough Arts and Cultural Advisory Panel of 24 June 2025 and the Autumn/Winter 2025 Theatre Programme

2. Background

Members were reminded that the role of the Arts and Cultural Advisory Panel was to provide advice, support and advocacy for the Borough's Arts and Cultural Service to enable it to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2030.

The specific role of the Panel was set out in a Constitution, which includes the following objectives:

- To advise the Council on the programming of arts and cultural activity throughout the Borough
- To provide advocacy for the arts and cultural sector
- To provide the Council with an insight into current issues affecting arts and culture throughout Northern Ireland
- To represent the arts and cultural community both locally and regionally
- To contribute expertise, skills and knowledge from specific genres for the benefit of the ongoing development of arts and culture in the Borough

The Panel was made up of one Elected Member from each Political Party and up to 12 non-elected independent members who were actively involved in the arts and culture sector. The Panel met four times each year and reported to the Community Development Committee.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The establishment of the Borough Arts and Cultural Panel for the Council term was approved at the Council meeting in June 2023. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved at the March 2025 Community Development Committee meeting.

4. Advisory Panel Meeting

Members were advised that the Borough Arts and Culture Advisory Panel met on 24 June 2025 in Mossley Mill. The draft minutes of this meeting and the Theatre Programmes for Autumn/Winter 2025, which were presented at the meeting, were circulated for Members' information.

5. Financial Position

There were no financial implications to the Council.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

Members were aware that a comprehensive review of all Council working groups was being undertaken and Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Proofing would be carried out as part of this review.

7. Governance

The specific role of the Panel was set out in a Constitution which included the above-mentioned objectives. The Panel was made up of one Elected Member from each Political Party and up to 12 non-elected independent members who were actively involved in the arts and culture sector. The Panel met four times each year, and reported to the Community Development Committee.

8. Summary

The Borough Arts and Cultural Advisory Panel's role was to provide advice, support and advocacy for the Borough's Arts and Cultural Services to enable it to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2030. The Panel met four times each year and reported to the Community Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Alderman McGrath and agreed that

the draft minutes of the Borough Arts and Culture Advisory Panel of 24 June 2025 be approved as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting, and the Autumn/Winter 2025 Theatre Programmes also be approved.

ACTION BY: Joanne Hamilton-Whyte, PA Director of Community Development

Councillor Wilson joined the meeting remotely at this point of the meeting.

3.12 **AC/MU/005 RENEWAL OF LEASE OF THE WHITE HOUSE**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a further one-year renewal of the lease agreement with the Dalaradia Group for the White House.

2. Introduction/Background

The Dalaradia Group was a men's community group based in Newtownabbey who wished to make a positive commitment to conflict transformation. The Group had leased the White House in Whiteabbey from the Council since 2021, delivering historical interpretation, visitor services, training and meeting facilities.

Dating from 1569, the White House was originally a plantation bawn, or fortified house. The building had witnessed many important scenes from local history, from the sailing ships carrying King William's armies and Titanic sailing on her maiden voyage, to the Luftwaffe bombers using Belfast Lough as their gateway into the city.

The White House had been restored from a crumbling ruin into a beautiful, multipurpose building. It hosted two exciting interactive exhibitions: 'A Tale of Three Kings' recounting the Williamite and Jacobite Wars from a European perspective, while 'Relive the History' told the exciting story of the building's past, right up to the present day.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that a proposal from the Dalaradia Group to rent the White House at £2,400 per annum for an initial twelve month period was

approved by the Council in April 2021, and this was further extended in September 2022, 2023 and 2024.

4. 2024-2025 Performance

Over the past year (August 2024 – July 2025) the White House had increased visitor numbers by 715 when compared to the previous year. The Dalaradia Group had continued to facilitate public access to the White House 3 days per week from May to September and 2 days per week from October to April, with visits by appointment also available on any day.

Usage statistics are as follows:

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Number of walk-ins on open days	490	480
Attendees at Dalaradia Group activities	350	360
Number of events, tours and meetings	45	96
Attendances at events/tours/meetings	1,736	2,400
Total recorded footfall	2,621	3,336

5. Proposed Lease Agreement

Members were advised that the current lease arrangements were as follows:

1. The Dalaradia Group pays a monthly rent of £200 gross plus running costs associated with utilities, while the Council retains responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building which cost £5,633 in 2024/25
2. The Group mainly occupies the upper floor of the building, using the meeting facility to deliver a range of training services including TNI World Host Programme and other job vocational training to support return to employment and provide meeting space for other local groups
3. The Group operates the White House as a visitor attraction, providing guiding and visitor services and hosting temporary exhibitions throughout the year

6. Financial Position

The existing lease agreement with the Dalaradia Group generated income for the Council of £2,400 per annum. In addition, the agreement saved the Council approximately £1,200 in utility costs and £4,800 in staff costs annually.

7. Summary

The Dalaradia Group had indicated that they would like to renew the lease of the White House for a further year on the same terms as previously agreed.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop

Seconded by Alderman Ross and agreed that

a renewal of the lease agreement with the Dalaradia Group to rent The White House at £2,400 per annum for a further 12-month period be approved, with

the Group facilitating public access to the venue as per current arrangements.

ACTION BY: Philip Magennis, Culture & Events Co-ordinator

3.13 AC/HE/046 RENEWAL OF LEASE OF THE APARTMENT AND CRAFT WORKSHOP AT POGUES ENTRY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a one-year renewal of the lease agreement with Tourist Wise Ltd (Brilliant Trails) for the Apartment and Craft Workshop at Pogues Entry.

2. Introduction/Background

Tourist Wise Ltd (Brilliant Trails) was an award-winning company with many years of experience in developing creative and bespoke trails for clients in the UK and internationally. The company had been based at Pogues Entry since 2024.

Pogues Entry is a cottage in Antrim town dating to 1700, which was the childhood home of writer and missionary Alexander Irvine. His book 'My Lady of Chimney Corner' recalls his boyhood years in Pogue's Entry and describes the lives of Irish country folk after the famine.

The cottage was preserved in its original state as a tribute to Dr Irvine, and a second cottage directly opposite contains an apartment and craft workshop, now converted into office accommodation.

Since 2017 the garden of Pogues Entry had been managed by the Irish Garden Plant Society, volunteers from which had created a new heritage cottage fruit and vegetable garden and reinvigorated the lawn borders with Irish varieties of plants and shrubs.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that a proposal from Tourist Wise Ltd (Brilliant Trails) to rent the apartment and craft workshop facilities at Pogues Entry at £2,400 per annum plus running costs for an initial 12 month period was approved by the Community Development Committee in September 2024. Under the agreement, they also operated the Historical Cottage as a visitor attraction providing guiding and visitor services on the Council's behalf on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from May to September.

4. 2024-2025 Performance

Visitor numbers for the year to date currently stood at 519.

5. Proposed Lease Agreement

Members were advised that the current lease arrangements were as follows:

- Tourist Wise Ltd occupied the apartment (downstairs room, upstairs room, bathroom and kitchen) as an office and meeting room, and use the adjoining craft workshop for their main design office.
- Tourist Wise Ltd paid a monthly rent of £200 net for the lease of these rooms and is responsible for all utility costs.
- Between May and September Tourist Wise Ltd operated the public spaces on the site (The Heritage Cottage / Chimney Corner and the adjoining interpretative room), providing guiding and visitor services on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.
- The garden remained under the care of the Irish Garden Plant Society (IGPS) who had developed this space in partnership with the Council for a number of years. The IGPS continued to have right of way access to the toilet and kitchen facilities in the apartment.
- The Council retained responsibility for maintenance and repair of the buildings, which cost £5,473 in 2024/25.

6. Financial Position/Implication

This lease agreement generated rental income of £2,400 net per year. It also created savings for the Council of approximately £1,100 for utilities, and approximately £3,600 for staff costs / visitor servicing.

7. Summary

Tourist Wise Ltd (Brilliant Trails) had indicated that they would like to renew the lease of the Apartment and Craft Workshop at Pogues Entry for a further year on the same terms as previously agreed.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

an extension of the current lease agreement with Tourist Wise Ltd (Brilliant Trails) to lease the Apartment and Craft Workshop at Pogues Entry for a monthly fee of £200 for a further 12-month period be approved with the group continuing to provide public access to the Historical Cottage as per current arrangements.

ACTION BY: Philip Magennis, Culture & Events Coordinator

3.14 ED/TOU/035 VISIT BELFAST PARTNERSHIP RENEWAL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the renewal of the partnership agreement with Visit Belfast for a further 12 months at the same rate as in 2024/25.

2. Introduction/Background

Visit Belfast was the official destination marketing organisation for Belfast and Northern Ireland more generally, with a core purpose to create and service

visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate economic benefit and inclusive growth.

In addition to managing the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre on Donegall Square, Visit Belfast also operated a purpose-built Visitor Information Centre at Belfast International Airport, providing tourist information to visitors arriving into Northern Ireland. The airport was the main gateway to Northern Ireland with 6.7 million passengers passing through in 2024.

Since 2015, the Council had maintained a partnership with Visit Belfast, allowing it access to a wide range of marketing networks and media to promote the Borough. The cost of this partnership has decreased from an initial £20,000 per annum in 2015 to £8,500 in 2023 and 2024.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In October 2024 the Community Development Committee approved a 12-month fee of £8,500 for the Visit Belfast partnership, including a significantly enhanced benefits package.

4. Benefits of the Partnership

The benefits package offered to Council included:

- The exclusive use of the front-facing digital screen and the promotion of at least six destinations in the Borough at Belfast International Airport Visitor Information Centre. In 2024/25 this has featured flagship events, guided tours at Antrim Castle Gardens, Council-operated golf facilities and key accommodation and hospitality providers.
- Pop-up banners at both Belfast International Airport and the Welcome Centre in Belfast to promote flagship events. Banners were used in 2024/25 to promote Enchanted Winter Garden, Garden Show Ireland and the Christmas productions at Theatre at the Mill.
- A large graphic panel and a pillar wrap at the Belfast International Airport Visitor Information Centre promoting tourist destinations in the Borough. This currently features Antrim Castle Gardens, the Coronation Garden, Antrim Loughshore Park and Theatre at the Mill.
- A display in the Welcome Centre's main 'Christmas' window (directly facing the Belfast Christmas Market) promoting Enchanted Winter Garden.
- Priority literature racking and distribution of Antrim and Newtownabbey Visitor Guides and other printed material at both the Welcome Centre and Belfast International Airport.
- Visit Belfast staff trained on priority events, attractions, experiences and accommodation in the Borough to effectively respond to visitor enquiries.
- The promotion of the Borough as a destination on a new digital touch screen in Belfast Grand Central Station.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The proposed partnership fee of £8,500 had been included in the 2025/26 Tourism budget.

6. Summary

The Council has had a partnership agreement with Visit Belfast since 2015, focused on the promotion of its events, visitor experiences, destinations and accommodation providers at the Belfast International Airport Visitor Information Centre and at the Welcome Centre in Belfast.

Visit Belfast's proposal for the next 12 months would provide an attractive package of promotional opportunities for the same fee as in 2024/25.

Proposed by Councillor McGrann

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the proposal to renew the partnership with Visit Belfast for a further 12 months be approved.

ACTION BY: Marie-Clare McGeachy, Tourism Officer

3.15 AC/THB/008 BALLYCLARE TOWN HALL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band to sell alcohol in Ballyclare Town Hall on Saturday 18th October 2025 at their cultural evening, subject to them applying for and being granted an alcohol licence.

2. Introduction/Background

Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band had made an application to hire Ballyclare Town Hall on Saturday 18th October 2025 for a cultural evening. In addition, they had requested permission to sell alcohol at this event, subject to them applying for and being granted an alcohol licence. The Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band was a community-based marching flute band located in Ballyclare. They host annual local parades and were well known for organising major cultural events in the town, including large-scale gatherings featuring bands from across the region.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were advised that a number of previous requests to the Council seeking permission to serve and sell alcohol at Ballyclare Town Hall had been approved. Most recently this had included a request by Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band for an event in March 2025, which was approved by the Committee in February 2025.

4. Key Issues

The current terms and conditions of hire for the Town Hall stated the following in relation to alcohol:

- Alcohol is not permitted on the premises without prior consent from the Council.

In addition, if a group wished to sell alcohol and apply for an alcohol licence, then they must first seek the Council's permission.

5. Financial Position/Implication

There were no financial implications for the Council of this proposal.

6. Summary

The Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band wished to sell alcohol in Ballyclare Town Hall on Saturday 18th October 2025 at their cultural evening, subject to receiving an alcohol licence. Council permission was required for them to do this.

Proposed by Alderman Ross
Seconded by Councillor Dunlop and agreed that

the request from Ballyclare Memorial Flute Band to sell alcohol in Ballyclare Town Hall on Saturday 18th October 2025 at their cultural evening subject to the granting of an alcohol licence, be approved.

ACTION BY: Jenna Collier, Theatre Bookings and Events Manager

3.16 CP/CF/004 PARKHALL COMMUNITY CENTRE – FLUTE BAND REQUEST

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the Steeple Veterans Flute Band to apply for an alcohol licence to sell and consume alcohol in Parkhall Community Centre on 18 October 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were advised that the Steeple Veterans Flute Band had made a request to hire Parkhall Community Centre on Saturday 18th October 6pm to 1am for an exhibition and indoor flute band celebration.

The Band had requested permission to apply for a license to sell alcohol at their event. The consumption and sale of alcohol is permitted with agreement by Council if the relevant licence is obtained by the event organiser.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were advised Steeple Veterans Flute Band were granted permission at the September 2024 Community Development Committee to apply for an alcohol licence to sell alcohol in Parkhall Community Centre for an event on 12 October 2024.

A number of previous similar requests to the Council seeking permission to serve and sell alcohol at functions in community facilities had been approved.

4. Financial Position/Implication

There were no financial implications for the Council from approval of this request.

5. Summary

A request had been received by the Steeple Veterans Flute Band to apply for an alcohol licence to sell and consume alcohol in Parkhall Community Centre at a cultural event on 18th October 2025.

A number of previous similar requests had been approved by the Committee and it was proposed that permission was granted for this request.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop

Seconded by Alderman Ross and agreed that

the request from the Steeple Veterans Flute Band to apply for an alcohol licence to sell alcohol in Parkhall Community Centre on Saturday 18 October 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Townsend, Community Facilities Coordinator

3.17 CP/TD/107 AREAS AT RISK FUNDING 2026/27

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval on arrangements for the Areas at Risk Funding Programme in 2026/27.

2. Introduction/Background

The Areas at Risk (AAR) programme was delivered across six Super Output Areas in the Borough. Historically the Newtownabbey AAR programme had been part funded by the Department for Communities (DfC), whilst the Antrim AAR programme was fully funded by the Council.

3. Previous Council Decision

Members were reminded that at the November 2020 Community Planning Committee the move to an open competitive Areas at Risk programme was approved. However, this was placed on hold by Members in January 2021 due to ongoing impact of COVID-19 and the DfC People and Place review of Neighbourhood Renewal and Areas at Risk. It was agreed that a Council review of AAR be deferred until after the DfC review was completed.

The Areas at Risk Programme for 2025/2026, including total funding of £238,130, was approved at the March 2025 meeting of the Committee. This included the anticipated £66,750 from the DfC.

4. 2026/27 Programme

The DfC's ongoing People and Place Review, initiated in 2022, provided a re-evaluation of area-based interventions and the future of funding mechanisms designed to tackle deprivation. While this review was still underway, the evolving socio-economic landscape—including the prolonged cost-of-living crisis—requires more agile, responsive, and locally managed approach to support the communities most at risk.

It was therefore proposed to establish a refreshed Areas at Risk Grant Funding Stream, rebranded as the Elevate – Community Renewal and Resilience Fund. This fund was designed to complement and anticipate the outcomes of the People and Place Review, effectively future-proofing area-based funding by embedding flexibility, co-design, and evidence-based targeting within the delivery model. This approach would:

- Ensure continuity of support in Super Output Areas (SOAs) already identified for funding by DfC (Carnmoney, Monkstown, and Mossley) and Council supported areas (Ballycraigy, Farranshane, and Inner Antrim town).
- Lay the foundation for adaptation once DfC's longer-term strategic framework is published.
- Provide accessible, transparent, and impact-driven funding opportunities for community and voluntary organisations operating within clearly identified areas of social and economic deprivation.
- Align with DfC's *Areas at Risk* objectives, including:
 - Improving community cohesion.
 - Enhancing social inclusion.
 - Reducing inequality.
 - Building community capacity.
- Encourage new and existing organisations to develop innovative, needs-based programmes to address local challenges in targeted neighbourhoods.

Officers had consulted with DfC and while there was no scope to increase the overall funding available or alter the strategic aims of the Newtownabbey programme, DfC had expressed support for incorporating the refreshed programme into a dedicated open call, subject to funding continuing to be allocated to the established Areas at Risk locations of Mossley, Monkstown, and Carnmoney. This approach would:

- Improve accessibility for new organisations and projects operating within or in close proximity to the designated areas.
- Allow existing organisations to revise their plans to better reflect current community and social needs.
- Ensure all funded projects continue to meet DfC's and Council's funding requirements.

Proposed Funding Framework

- Duration: Awards would be made for a two-year period, with a formal Letter of Offer for Year 1 and indicative funding for Year 2 (subject to confirmation of DfC allocation).
- Administration: Managed by the Council's Grant Funding Unit. Grant guidance notes would be developed and reported to a future meeting of the Community Development Committee.
- Eligibility: Limited to areas within the top 20% of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NINIS), excluding Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. Funding guidelines will reflect that core costs or specific projects which are clearly the responsibility of another statutory organisation will not be eligible.
- Funding Awards: £5,000 to £25,000
- Application Process:
 - Officers would proactively engage with existing Areas at Risk organisations in the Borough and invite applications via the online Grant Management platform.
 - An open call would follow in Autumn 2026 as part of wider Community Development Directorate funding for 2026/27.

5. Financial Position

Project Proposal 2026/27

- The Newtownabbey Areas at Risk Project covers Carnmoney, Monkstown and Mossley.
- The Antrim Areas at Risk Project covers Farranshane, Ballycraigy and Steeple
- The contribution committed by the Council in 2025/26 to the Newtownabbey Areas at Risk Projects was **£60,170**, a similar allocation would be included in the 2026/27 Community Development budget estimates.
- The contribution committed by the Council in 2025/2026 for Antrim AAR was **£111,210**, a similar allocation will be included in the 2026/27 Community Development budget estimates.
- A Letter of Offer from DfC to confirm their 2026/27 contribution was anticipated for the same amount of £66,750.
- Based on previous years funding, it was proposed that an open call for 2026/2027 funding was developed subject to confirmation of funding from DfC to be made in early 2026.
- Each application would be assessed against criteria and proposed funding awards would be brought back to the Community Development Committee for approval.

6. Equality Screening and Rural Needs

As part of the Council's responsibilities to identify and address potential Section 75 implications and promote equality of opportunity and good relations as required by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the policy had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and was screened out for the need

of an Equality Impact Assessment. A copy of the Section 75 Equality Screening Form was circulated.

In addition, the Rural Needs Act placed a duty on public authorities and local Councils to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. A Rural Needs screening exercise, which was circulated, had been completed.

7. Governance

The grant programme would be managed through the Council's Grant Funding Unit and would align with the Council's Funding Policy and Financial Regulations.

Organisations who met the eligibility criteria based on location and project proposals meeting the grant criteria would proceed to scoring stage.

DfC funding would be ring-fenced to grant applications within the current agreed areas only and reported on in line with current processes and procedures.

8. Summary

The AAR Programme was delivered across six Super Output Areas in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

In 2026/27 it was proposed to create a competitive open grant call for organisations working within the identified areas of deprivation, excluding Neighbourhood Renewal areas which were already in receipt of monies through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

Areas at Risk organisations who had historically been invited to apply for Areas at Risk Funding would be invited into the new grant call supported by Council Officers with applications as part of a transition period.

The Head of Community Development clarified that the current output Areas at Risk would only be those identified in the report and that other Groups within the output areas would be able to apply through an open call. He also confirmed that Officers are in regular contact with DfC with regard to the updated report and that schools would still be eligible to apply for community based activities that are not within the remit of another Department or funding stream.

Proposed by Councillor McGrann
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the proposals for the Areas at Risk Funding Programme 2026/27, as outlined, be approved.

ACTION BY: Conor Cunning, DEA Manager and Stefanie Buchanan, Community Development Manager

3.18 AC/GEN/085, CP/GEN/046 AND CP/GEN/048 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANT AID MULTI YEAR GRANT PAYMENTS APPROVAL OF FUNDING FOR YEARS 2 AND 3

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to clarify funding approval of existing multi-year grant funding awards previously reported to Committee for approval.

2. Background

Members were aware that the establishment of a central Grant Funding Unit for the Council has been ongoing with the Funding Unit operational from 1 April 2025. Officers responsible for the award of grant funding had been working closely with the Grant Funding Unit in order to continuously improve the operation of grant funding including governance arrangements.

As part of this, it had been identified that a number of Culture and Community multi-year funding awards previously approved by the Committee did not have explicit approval for funding related to subsequent years beyond initial approvals.

In order to ensure smooth release of grant funding awards and comply with governance arrangements, which required explicit approval of all funding awards, Members were asked to clarify approval for multi-year funding approvals relating to a number of Culture and Community Grant Programmes.

3. Previous Decisions Requiring Clarification

Members were reminded that a presentation to the Committee on the Community Development Grant Aid Programme was made in September 2022 and proposed changes to the programme were approved. This included the introduction of up to three-year funding awards for a number of programmes including Community Festival Funding and Community Facilities, Programmes and Activity Grant Aid.

At the Community Planning Committee in February 2023 60 applications totalling £442,907.84 were approved in the Community Facilities, Programmes and Activities grant aid programme for annual funding in 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26.

At the Committee in January 2024 a further 6 applications totalling £35,000 were approved from the Community Facilities, Programmes and Activities grant aid programme for funding in 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.

At the Community Planning Committee in April 2024 2 applications totalling £8,750 were approved for Community Festival Funding in 2024/2025, 2025/2026 and 2026/2027.

The meeting minute for each of the approvals above does not explicitly cover approvals for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027.

4. Community Development Grant Aid Multi Year Funding Approvals

Given the requirement for explicit Council approval in order to award all funding, Members are asked to clarify approval for funding awards previously reported to Committee as having successfully secured multi-year under the following funding programmes:

- Community Facilities, Programmes and Activities and
- Community Festival Funding.

Details of grant programmes, successful applicants and amount awarded for each financial year was circulated for Members' information.

5. Finance

The budget for the current financial year provided for these funding award commitments. The required budget for 2026/2027 would be allocated as part of the annual estimate setting process to cover in full existing multi-year funding commitments.

Funding awards continue to be dependent upon applicants meeting funding criteria and providing all relevant documentation in order for payments to be released.

6. Governance

The Grant Funding Unit became operational on 1 April 2025 and co-ordinated the operation of grant funding programmes by the Community Development Directorate. As part of the ongoing process of continuously improving the grant funding services, Officers had identified the need to clarify multi year funding awards previously reported to Committee.

Explicit approval was required for all funding awards in order to release payments to the successful applicants.

7. Equality Screening

A Section 75 Equality Screening exercise and Rural Proofing of the Grant Funding Policy was carried out with the outcome approved by the Policy and Governance Committee in January 2025.

8. Summary

As part of the ongoing establishment of the Grant Funding Unit and continuous improvement of the grant funding service the requirement to clarify multi-year funding awards under two Community Development Directorate programmes had been identified. It was proposed that approval for multi-year awards under the Community Facilities, Programmes and Activities and Community Festival Fund programmes for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 as detailed be given.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
 Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the 2025/26 and 2026/27 funding awards from the Community Facilities, Programmes and Activities and the Community Festival Fund programmes as detailed, be approved.

ACTION BY: Simon Goldrick, Head of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Events, Ronan McKenna, Head of Community Development, and Anna Boyle, Grant Funding Unit Manager

3.19 CP/CD/201 COMMUNITY FACILITIES – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR SERVICE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Expression of Interest process relating to Service Management Agreements for the operation of Council owned Community Facilities

2. Introduction/Background

The Council owned 11 Community Facilities, 8 of which were managed by the Community Development Section as follows.

- Greystone Community Centre
- Muckamore Community Centre
- Parkhall Community Centre
- Rathenraw Community Centre
- Stiles Community Centre
- Neillsbrook Community Centre
- The Dunanney Centre
- Lillian Bland Pavilion

Three community facilities were being operated under Service Management Agreements with community organisations running the facilities in partnership with the Council. Details of the Service Management Agreements were listed for Members information.

Facility	Community Group	Contract Period
Monkstown Jubilee Centre	Monkstown Community Association	1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028

The Sovereign Complex	Rathfern Community Regeneration Group Ltd	1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028
Northern Ireland Centenary Community Centre Ballyduff	Ballyduff Community Redevelopment Group	1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that it was agreed at the Council meeting in May 2018 to initiate an Expression of Interest (EOI) process across the Borough to determine interest from community organisations in Service Management Agreements to operate Community Centres. This process had been disrupted by the pandemic in early 2020 and recommenced in 2022.

Following this the Service Management Agreement with Ballyduff Community Redevelopment Group to operate The Northern Ireland Centenary Community Centre Ballyduff for an initial 12-month period, commencing on 1 January 2024, was approved at the December 2023 Community Planning Committee.

The renewal of all 3 existing Service Management Agreements with community organisations for a further 3-year period until 31 March 2028 at a total cost of £105,000 per annum, was agreed at the December 2024 Community Development Committee.

An Expression of Interest process to determine interest amongst other community groups for Service Management Agreements to operate Council owned community facilities was approved at the May 2025 Committee Development Committee.

4. Key issues

An Expression of Interest process opened on 18 June 2025 and closed 08 August 2025. The purpose of this stage of the process was to determine interest before assessing the capacity of organisations through development of robust business plans to potentially operate Council owned community facilities through a Service Management Agreement.

Six organisations had submitted an Expression of Interest, and these were circulated for Members' information, in managing a Council owned Community Facility.

Officers would arrange to meet with these groups in the Autumn to progress a proposed 4-stage process, a copy of which was circulated for Members' information consisting of the following stages:

1. Expression of Interest (completed)
2. Training and Mentoring
3. Business Plan
4. Formal Application

This programme would be delivered as part of PEACEPLUS 'Our Shared Borough' programme, led by the Community Development team, with appropriate external expertise procured to support the process.

5. Financial Position

There was no financial cost for the Expression of Interest process to determine interest in Service Management Agreements for the operation of Council owned community facilities.

The costs to progress the 4-stage plan would be funded through the PEACEPLUS 'Our Shared Borough' programme, at no cost to the Council.

The current operating costs of the 11 community facilities is in excess of £600,000 per annum.

The Service Management Agreement arrangement had been shown to be a more efficient model of community centre operation with operational costs covered by an annual grant that is less than the annual cost of the Council operated facilities. This approach had also achieved increased use of the facilities and increased community development outcomes when compared to direct Council operation.

6. Equality Screening

As part of the Council's responsibilities to identify and address potential Section 75 implications and promote equality of opportunity and good relations as required by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the policy had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an Equality Impact Assessment. A copy of the Section 75 Equality Screening Form was circulated.

In addition, the Rural Needs Act places a duty on public authorities and local Councils to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. A Rural Needs screening exercise was completed and was circulated for Members' information.

7. Summary

The Council owned 11 community facilities, three of which were operated under Service Management Agreements in partnership with community organisations.

Following the completion of an Expression of Interest process for community groups for Service Management Agreements for the operation of Council owned community facilities, it was proposed that the rest of the 4-stage process, including training mentoring and business planning be delivered as part of PEACEPLUS 'Our Shared Borough' programme,

A further update on progress and outcome of this 4-stage process would be brought back to a future Committee meeting.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the Expression of Interest submissions be noted and continuation of the 4-stage process to support community organisations to progress to a Service Management Agreement for the operation of Council owned Community Facilities be approved.

ACTION BY: Stef Buchanan, Community Development Manager

3.20 COMD/CD/009 CHRISTMAS FESTIVITY PROGRAMME 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the delivery of the 2025 Christmas Festivity Programme and Spirit of Christmas Awards.

2. Background

Since November 2018, the Council had been delivering Christmas Lights Switch On Events in each District Electoral Area across the Borough.

The programme at each event encompassed a range of family entertainment to include: Christmas Fun Rides, The Santa Express, Street Entertainment, Festive Food Stalls, Arts and Crafts and a short programme of Christmas Readings, Carols and Music following which the Mayor accompanied by the Schools Competition Winner and Santa switched on the Christmas Tree Lights.

Local School Choirs, Traditional Music Groups, Dance Academies and other local artistes participated in the ninety-minute programme the theme for which changed on an annual basis.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that the "Step into the Season" themed Christmas Switch On Programme, inspired by the 2024 Olympics and Paralympics, was approved by the Community Development Committee in October 2024.

The programme was delivered live in each DEA and streamed online. In total the programme attracted in excess of 12,000 attendees.

4. Proposal for 2025

Since November 2018, Council had delivered 7 Christmas Light Switch On Events across the Borough. In 2024, the "Switch On" programme was delivered at a cost of £101,222.

Attendance at the events in 2024 is detailed below:

DEA	Date & Time	Attendees (approximate)
Airport DEA Crumlin Leisure Centre	Thursday 21 November 2024, 6.00pm - 7.30pm	800
Dunsilly DEA Randalstown - John Street Car Park	Friday 22 November 2024, 6.00pm - 7.30pm	2000
Glengormley DEA Lilian Bland Park	Saturday 23 November 2024, 4.30pm - 6.00pm	2000
Macedon DEA Hazelbank Park	Tuesday 26 November 2024, 7.00pm - 8.30pm	2500
Threemilewater DEA Mossley Mill	Wednesday 27 November 2024, 6.00pm - 7.30pm	300
Antrim DEA Railway Street Car Park	Thursday 28 November 2024, 6.00pm - 7.30pm	2000
Ballyclare DEA The Square Car Park	Saturday 30 November 2024, 4.30pm - 6.00pm	2500
Total		12,100

Online live streaming of each event was introduced in 2020 during the COVID pandemic; however, in 2024 the numbers viewing had dwindled from 78,483 at its peak in 2020 to only 9,580. This element of the events takes up £10,000 of the overall budget and is hugely time intensive. However, detailed analysis shows that average watch time is just 2.7 minutes. It was therefore proposed to stop this element of the switch on events.

Analysis of Other Council Areas and Timeframes

An analysis of similar arrangements across the other ten Council areas indicated that the vast majority of other Councils deliver Christmas switch-on events within their respective legacy Council areas, rather than extending these events to each individual District Electoral Area.

The Council did not begin town centre illuminations or Christmas switch-on events until after 11 November, in respect of the Remembrance period. This created a narrow timeframe to deliver the seven existing events, which were ideally completed in November to support retail and precede the Enchanted Winter Garden, which traditionally started the last weekend of November. The Council also supported around 12 community led Christmas Switch on events over the same period. As a result, community events often clashed with Council Switch-Ons. The tight schedule also increased the risk of weather-related cancellations, with limited opportunity for rescheduling. In addition, some of the locations presented capacity, safety and logistical challenges.

Delivering seven large-scale switch-on events over a 7–10 day period required substantial staff resources, absorbing the Community Development Officers from early September to late November. The online elements were particularly resource-intensive, and additional staff support resulted in

significant time off in lieu post-Christmas. This placed considerable pressure on the team and limited their capacity to undertake other vital community development work during this period.

Following a review and online evaluation of the 2024 Programme, which provided valuable feedback for future event planning, it was proposed that the existing 7 DEA Christmas Light Switch On Events be reduced to 3 major flagship events in 2025 as follows:

- Antrim Town Centre
- Newtownabbey (V36 at the Valley)
- Ballyclare Town Centre

The circulated map illustrated that the proposed locations provided access for the vast majority of Borough residents within a 20-minute drive time and were balanced geographically covering both urban and rural areas.

The proposed locations, Antrim Town Centre, Newtownabbey (V36) and Ballyclare Town Centre were chosen based on the following factors:

Proven Attendance

All three locations consistently achieved high audience numbers: Antrim Town Centre (2,000), Newtownabbey – Spooked Out Event at V36 (8,000+) and Ballyclare Town Centre (2,500) representing the largest and most engaged festive audiences across the Borough.

V36 at The Valley entertained annually 8,500 at the very successful Spooked Out at The Valley Halloween Event and, as a purpose-built event space with parking, a range of accessible facilities and hospitality offered, was seen as having the potential for an enhanced Newtownabbey flagship Switch On event.

Balanced Geographic Coverage & Venue Suitability

These venues ensured fair representation across the Borough, and prevented any one area from being overlooked and maintained equitable access for all residents. Each site offered an established, safe, and accessible event space capable of hosting large crowds, while supporting local business activity during the key pre-Christmas trading period.

Community Integration

The chosen locations complemented, rather than duplicated community led switch-ons, provided flagship events that brought together surrounding towns and villages while allowing smaller communities to continue with their own celebrations.

The proposal to reduce the number of events from 7 to 3 would bring about the following benefits:

- **Streamlining of Resources** – Reducing the number of events allowed officers to streamline resources and focus on the logistics of fewer locations. This would lead to better planning and organisation, enhanced

safety measures and less time commitment from officers, on-call events assistants and volunteers at this challenging time of the year.

- **Enhanced Experience and Impact** – Reducing the number of events from 7 to 3 would result in the remaining 3 events becoming larger and more spectacular, particularly the event proposed for V36 which could be seen as a “Big Unified Celebration” with much larger crowds similar in scale to those witnessed at the Annual Halloween Celebrations.
- **Increased Publicity and Social Media Coverage** – Larger events such as that proposed for V36 attract more media coverage and social media buzz.
- **Environmental Benefits** – Reduced environmental impact, less energy consumption and waste produced. Reduced Carbon Footprint due to less travel by Event Promoters, Performers and Attendees.
- **Economic Impact and Focus** – A concentrated impact on 3 events as opposed to 7 would provide the opportunity to establish more strategic partnerships and stronger collaborative links between local businesses, sponsors and the wider community.
- **Cost Savings** – With fewer events, resources could be concentrated on ensuring the remaining events were larger, more inclusive, had a significantly greater impact and were of a higher quality.

Festive Lit Trees

Under this proposal existing festive and illuminated trees in Antrim Town Centre, Ballyclare Town Centre, Crumlin, Randalstown, Hazelbank Park, Monkstown and Glengormley Town Centre would remain, with an additional tree being erected for the flagship event at V36.

5. 2025 Programme Delivery

Officers had started planning for the current year's events and had taken into consideration feedback from 2024 and the following was proposed for 2025:

- Delivery of the Consolidated Programme of 3 Christmas Light Switch On Events over the period: Thursday 20 – Saturday 22 November 2025. If the existing programme of 7 events continued to be delivered, then the events would take place over the period: Thursday 20 – Saturday 29 November 2025.
- Times would facilitate traffic management arrangements and ensured young families could enjoy the full experience of the events.
- The switching on of the Christmas Lights would once again take place at the mid-point of the proposed ninety-minute programme as opposed to the end in order to facilitate those attending with very young children.
- A programme of family fun entertainment to include: A Children's Pantomime, Live Festive Music, Carols, Switching on of the Christmas Tree Lights, Fun Fair Rides, Festive Food Stalls, Arts and Crafts Activities and Street Entertainment would be delivered at each venue.
- The end of online streaming of the switch on events would achieve cost savings of approximately £10,000.

The theme for this current year's programme had yet to be decided but would be communicated to Members in advance of the events taking place.

All events would be advertised and promoted through an electronic and direct marketing campaign to encourage residents' participation.

6. Community Switch-On Events

As part of the Community Development Grant Aid Programme, Council operated a Christmas Celebration Events Fund to assist groups, in legacy locations across the Borough, that wished to develop and deliver Christmas Celebration events in the absence of a Council installed tree and associated switch-on ceremony.

Financial assistance of up to £1,000 was available to each of the following 15 legacy sites across the Borough, detailed as follows: Ballyduff, Ballynure, Ballyrobert, Bawnmore, Burnside, Doagh, Mallusk, Monkstown, New Mossley, Parkgate, Straid, Templepatrick, Tildarg, Toome and Whiteabbey.

Under the new proposal, it was recommended that Crumlin and Randalstown be included.

If the Council reduced to 3 Christmas Light Switch-On Events, it was proposed that the maximum grant award for the community led switch-on events be increased to £2,000. This reflected the continued popularity of these events and their positive contribution to fostering local community spirit. Groups who availed of this funding were required to cover the cost of their tree and lighting if this was a requirement of their event.

7. The Spirit of Christmas Awards

In addition, Members were also reminded of the "Spirit of Christmas Awards" which were launched in October 2021 and continued to prove popular, with in excess of 78 nominations received in 2024.

This year it was proposed that a similar competition was delivered, with awards being presented under the following 7 categories:

- **Light Up Award** - The wider community working together to create the most outstanding Christmas display or the best lit street, village or town in the Borough.
- **Rocking Around the Christmas Tree Award** - Best programme of festive entertainment within a business or community setting.
- **The Reason for the Season Award** - The most festive school, church or community facility.
- **The Making an Entrance Award** - The best dressed entrance feature or shop front.
- **Traditional Christmas Award** - Recognising acts of goodwill during the festive season.
- **Themed Award** – To be confirmed once the theme for the events has been agreed.
- **Mayors Award** - Most outstanding Christmas Display or Event in the Borough - Chosen by the Mayor

Nominations for the current year's competition would open on Wednesday 12 November and close on Monday 8 December at 4pm. Awards would be presented at a Christmas themed Celebration Event to be held in the Oriel Gallery, Antrim Castle Gardens on Wednesday 17 December 2025.

8. Financial Implication

Members were advised that provision of £100,000 for the 2025 Christmas Festivity Programme, The Spirit of Christmas Awards and £15,000 for the Christmas Celebration Events Fund had been included in the 2025/26 Community Development budgets.

Under the Consolidated Programme (3 events), it was proposed that the budget be allocated as follows:

Switch On Events	Amount
Antrim	£ 20,000
Newtownabbey (V36)	£ 20,000
Ballyclare Town Centre	£ 20,000
Christmas Celebration Events Fund	
17 Legacy Areas x £2,000	£ 34,000
Spirit of Christmas Awards	
Awards and Celebration Event	£ 2,000
Total Programme Cost	£ 96,000

9. Summary

It was proposed that the number of Christmas Light Switch-On Events to be delivered across the Borough in November 2025 be reduced to 3, with events to be held in Antrim Town Centre, Newtownabbey (V36) and Ballyclare Town Centre. If this proposal was approved, the events would take place from Thursday 20–Saturday 22 November 2025.

Lit Christmas trees would be provided in Antrim Town Centre, Ballyclare Town Centre, Crumlin, Randalstown, Hazelbank Park, Monkstown and Glengormley Town Centre, with an additional tree erected for the flagship event at V36.

Should the Consolidated Christmas Light Switch-On Events Programme be approved, it was proposed that the Upper Grant Threshold for the Christmas Celebration Events Fund be increased from £1,000 - £2,000 per area in 2025.

Nominations for the "Spirit of Christmas Awards" competition would open on Wednesday 12 November and close on Monday 8 December 2025.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile
 Seconded by Councillor O'Lone and agreed that

the Item be deferred to the September full Council meeting.

ACTION BY: Jonathan Henderson, Community Services Co-ordinator

3.21 CP/CP/237 WOMENS SUB COMMITTEE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the draft minutes of the Womens Sub Committee meeting held on 24 June 2025 as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

2. Introduction/Background

A motion to establish a stand- alone 'Women's Sub Committee' made up of female representatives of the Council to discuss and promote women's issues, build the skills and confidence of local women and to encourage women to become more involved in local politics was approved at the August 2023 Council meeting.

3. Previous Council Decision

The Terms of Reference for the Women's Sub Committee were approved at the November 2023 Community Planning Committee and provided the framework for the meetings. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved at the March 2025 Community Development Committee meeting.

4. Working Group Meeting

The Women's Sub Committee met on 24 June 2025; the minutes of the meeting were circulated.

5. Financial Position

There were no financial implications to the Council.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

A comprehensive review of all Council working groups was being undertaken and Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Proofing would be carried out as part of this review.

7. Governance

The specific role of the Women's Sub Committee was set out in the Terms of Reference which were approved at the November 2023 Community Planning Committee.

8. Summary

The Women's Sub Committee was made up of female representatives of the Council to discuss and promote women's issues, build the skills and confidence of local women and to encourage women to become more involved in local politics.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the draft minutes of the Women's Sub Committee Meeting held on 24 June 2025 be approved as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

ACTION BY: Joanne Hamilton-Whyte, PA to Director of Community Development

3.22 CP/CD/483 IPB PRIDE OF PLACE AWARDS 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval in relation to the attendance including associated costs at the IPB Pride of Place Annual Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony to be held in the Limerick Strand Hotel, on Friday 7 November 2025.

2. Background

Council participated annually in The IPB Pride of Place Awards delivered in association with Co-operation Ireland. The aim of the awards was to recognise the efforts and endeavours of communities throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to make their place the best place in which to live.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that in April 2025 the Council nominated three groups to take part in 2025's Annual IPB Pride of Place Awards competition namely:

- Dalaradia Cultural and Historical Society (Community Tourism Initiative)
- Rathenraw Youth Scheme (Community Youth Initiative)
- The Shed, Antrim (Creative Communities)

4. Proposal

Judging of the three entries took place in August 2025 and correspondence had been received from Co-operation Ireland informing Council that the annual Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony would take place on Friday 7 November 2025 in the Limerick Strand Hotel.

Ten complimentary tickets would be made available for the event with guidance that they were to be distributed as follows: Two tickets per nominated group with the remaining four tickets to be allocated to Members and Officers. A separate invitation would be issued to the Chief Executive.

Similar to previous years it was proposed that the Mayor, Mayors Consort, Chair of the Community Development Committee, or their nominated representatives, accompanied by a Council Officer attended the Gala

Dinner and Awards Ceremony along with the six group representatives on Friday 7 November 2025.

5. Financial Implication

As the venue for the event is approximately four hours and thirty minutes from the Borough and with the awards ceremony running until midnight it was proposed that Council provided financial assistance to cover the cost of one night's bed and breakfast accommodation for those that wished to stay. Hotel accommodation costs in the Limerick area had been researched and the total cost for accommodation for the ten attendees was estimated at approximately £1250. In addition, it was also proposed to provide financial assistance of up to a maximum of £75 per group to cover the costs of travel and subsistence provision which had been included in the Community Development Budget.

6. Summary

The Annual IPB Pride of Place Awards in association with Co-operation Ireland would take place on Friday 7 November 2025 in the Limerick Strand Hotel.

The Council nominated three groups to take part in the current year's Annual IPB Pride of Place Awards competition; Dalaradia Cultural and Historical Society, Rathenraw Youth Scheme and The Shed, Antrim.

It was proposed that the Mayor, Mayor's Consort, Chair of the Community Development Committee, or their nominated representatives, accompanied by a Council Officer attends the Awards along with the group representatives at an estimated cost of £1,475 to cover accommodation, travel and subsistence.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

the Mayor, Mayor's Consort, Chair of the Community Development Committee, or their nominated representatives, accompanied by a Council Officer attend the IPB Pride of Place Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony in Limerick on Friday 7 November 2025 at an estimated cost of £1475.

ACTION BY: Jonathan Henderson, Community Services Co-ordinator

3.23 AC/GEN/083 EXHIBITION OF THE HISTORY OF THE HIGH SHERIFF'S ROLE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to request that Members consider a request from Patricia Perry, 2024 High Sheriff of County Antrim, to host an exhibition on the history of the High Sheriff's role on a permanent basis.

2. Introduction/Background

During her time in office as the High Sheriff of County Antrim, Mrs. Patricia Perry developed a small exhibition to give people a better understanding of the history of the role which has been in existence since 1343. The exhibition included four calligraphic scrolls, which name most of the High Sheriffs since 1343, and nine information boards which detailed the influence the High Sheriffs have had in County Antrim, and how the role had evolved over the centuries.

The exhibition had been presented in a number of venues, including Antrim Library and Mossley Mill. Mrs Perry had recently approached Officers asking if the Council might wish to place this exhibition on permanent display within one of its facilities.

3. Previous Decisions of the Council

At the Community Development Committee in September 2024 the proposal to host an exhibition of the High Sheriff's role in Mossley Mill reception was approved with the exhibition taking place from 28 October – 22 November 2024.

4. Exhibition of The History of the High Sheriffs Role

The 2024 High Sheriff of County Antrim Mrs Patricia Perry had offered the Council, at no cost, a small exhibition for permanent display, which related to the history of the High Sheriffs role.

The permanent display of this exhibition could be accommodated at the Garden Heritage Exhibition space in Antrim Castle Gardens at no cost to the Council and available by the public to access free of charge.

5. Financial implications

The exhibition was being offered to the Council as a 'gift' with a view to ensuring that it was available to Borough and County Antrim residents in future years. There were no costs associated with this issue.

6. Summary

The 2024 High Sheriff of County Antrim, Mrs Patricia Perry, had offered an exhibition about the history of the High Sheriff's role to the Council at no cost for permanent display in one of the Council's exhibition spaces. It was proposed to install this small exhibition in the Garden Heritage Space at Antrim castle Gardens where the exhibition would compliment what is already on display and had the potential to be enjoyed by a wide audience.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Alderman Ross and agreed that

the offer of the High Sheriff exhibition from Mrs Patricia Perry be accepted and the exhibition incorporated into the Garden Heritage Space at Antrim Castle Gardens for permanent display.

ACTION BY: Simon Goldrick, Head of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Events

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 4 APRIL 2025 TO JULY 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Community Development Committee for Period 4 April 2025 to July 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

As agreed, quarterly budget reports would be presented to the relevant Committee. All financial reports would be available to all Members.

3. Summary

As at period 4:

The Community Development Directorate had a favourable variance of £94k, or 3.2%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

A report on the financial performance, employee costs, highest areas of expenditure and income, and the financial performance by each service area was circulated for Members' information.

The overall financial position of the Council would be presented to the Policy & Governance Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor O'Lone and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.2 CP/GEN/019 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SECTION - PARTNERSHIP MINUTES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the various minutes of the Partnership Meetings led by the Community Development Section which had been held in recent months.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were advised that the quarterly update Partnership Minutes as listed below could be viewed in the electronic folder called "**Partnership Minutes for Members Information**" on Ipads.

Community Development		
File Ref	Date of Meeting	Name of Partnership
D/Gen/91	-	Community Advice Antrim and Newtownabbey
D/DP/67	06.05.2025	Rathcoole Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership
D/CSP/48	26.03.2025	Antrim and Newtownabbey Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP)
D/DP/67	24.04.2025	Grange Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership
CP/GR/43	-	Traveller Issues Local Government Partnership

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
 Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

the update on Partnership Minutes be noted.

NO ACTION

4.3 COMD/CD/006 COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMME 2025-2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to inform Members on the offer of financial assistance received from the Department for Communities (DfC) for the Community Support Programme 2025/26.

2. Background

The Community Support Programme was established in 1975 and was a joint programme involving the Department for Communities (DfC) and local Councils. The programme supported the provision of community centres, local advice services, social supermarkets, resource centres, grants to community groups and the employment of community support staff in Councils.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In June 2024 Council was awarded an allocation of £479,046.79 towards the delivery of the programme in 2024/25.

4. Community Support Programme 2025/26

Correspondence, as circulated, had been received from the DfC confirming financial assistance totalling £548,838.67 for the delivery of the Council's Community Support Programme in 2025/26.

The total amount awarded included £148,279.64 for Community Support in general, such as staff salaries, the Community Development Grant Aid Programme and Community Capacity Building Initiatives, £228,694.14 for Community Advice Services and £171,864.89 for a Social Supermarket.

This offer of funding had been accepted by the Department's deadline of 11 July 2025.

5. Summary

The Council had received a revised offer for funding of £548,838.67 from the DfC for the costs associated with the Council's Community Support Programme for 2025/26.

The funding included contributions towards staff salaries, the Community Development Grant Aid Programme, Community Capacity Building Initiatives, Advice Services and the Social Supermarket project.

The offer of funding had been accepted by the Department's deadline of 11 July 2025.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the offer of Community Support Programme funding from the Department of Communities of £548,838.67 be noted.

NO ACTION

4.4 CP/GR/200 DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME 2025-2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Letter of Variance that had been received from The Executive Office (TEO) in relation to the 2025/26 District Council Good Relations Programme.

2. Introduction/Background

Since 1998, all Northern Ireland public bodies had a legal duty to promote good relations between people from different community, religious and racial backgrounds. In 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive furthered their commitment to good relations with the release of Together Building A United Community (T-BUC) strategy to improve community relations and continue the journey towards a more united and shared society.

The Council's Good Relations Programme aimed to improve day to day relationships by reducing all forms of prejudice, promoting equality and encouraging a society in which different cultures and traditions are understood, respected and accepted.

The Good Relations Action Plan reflected the aims and objectives of the central T-BUC strategy. It outlined how government, stakeholders, community and individuals will work together to achieve change against the following key priorities:

1. Our Children and Young People;
2. Our Shared Community;
3. Our Safe Community; and
4. Our Cultural Expression.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Executive Office (TEO) District Council Good Relations Programme funding 2025/26 of £108,562.50 and the Good Relations Action Plan 2025/26 were approved at the May 2025 Community Development Committee.

The 2025/26 funding offer equated to a 16% decrease in funding of £127,0276.27 received in 2024/25.

4. Key Issues

Correspondence (circulated) had been received from TEO offering financial assistance totalling £128,562.50 towards The District Council Good Relations Programme for the period 1 April 2025–31 March 2026.

The additional £20,000 on the original funding offer was designated to support activities which promote social and racial cohesion initiatives. No additional match funding was required from the Council.

Members were advised that this offer of funding had been accepted by TEO's deadline of 29 August 2025.

5. Financial Implication

The Executive Office required match funding of a minimum of 25% from local Councils towards the overall Good Relations budget. The Council's contribution of £36,187.50 towards the overall Good Relations budget was included within the approved 2025/26 Council estimates for the delivery of the plan.

The additional funding allocation of £20,000 did not require any additional match funding from Council resources.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

The 2025/26 Good Relations Action Plan had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an Equality Impact Assessment.

In addition, a Rural Needs screening exercise had been completed.

7. Summary

The Council had received a revised offer for funding of £128,562.50 from TEO for the costs associated with the District Council Good Relations Programme for 2025/26. No additional match funding was required.

The additional £20,000 was designated to support activities promoting social and racial cohesion.

Proposed by Alderman McGrath
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the offer of District Council Good Relations Programme funding from The Executive Office of £128,562.50 be noted.

NO ACTION

4.5 COMD/GR/004 GOOD RELATIONS WEEK 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the 2025 Good Relations Week programme.

2. Introduction/Background

Good Relations Week 2025 would run from Monday 13 October to Sunday 19 October 2025. The initiative was co-ordinated regionally by the Community Relations Council and supported by the Northern Ireland Executive's, Together Building a United Community Strategy.

The 2025 theme was 'Connect' - recognising that the foundation of a better community was built on People, Planet, and Prosperity, all connected by the goal of Peace.

Good Relations Week provided an opportunity to showcase the dynamism, creativity and dedication of local groups, organisations and individuals and to spotlight the transformative power of collaboration to address challenges such as sectarianism, racism, inequality, health and well-being, poverty and education.

Groups and organisations were invited to host a variety of activity that promoted diversity and inclusion across Northern Ireland.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that the Good Relations Action Plan 2025/26 was approved at the May 2025 Community Development Committee with provision for Good Relations Week activity included.

4. Good Relations Week 2025

It was proposed that The Council's Good Relations Team would deliver activities across the Borough to include;

- A Good Relations Week social media 'Connect' campaign
- The launch of Hate Crime Awareness training in partnership with Victim Support NI
- A Let's 'Connect' Football Tournament

- Cultural music, art and storytelling workshops in partnership with Libraries NI and community groups
- Oliver Jeffers 'Seen' Art Exhibition in partnership with Oliver Jeffers Studio
- A Dialogue Workshop for community leaders
- Good Relations Workshops for staff

All activities would be free of charge to participants. Further information on dates, times and venues would follow when finalised and be shared with Elected Members.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Provision of £2,500 for Good Relations Week activity had been made in the 2025/26 Good Relations Action Plan and budget.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

The 2025/26 Good Relations Action Plan had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an Equality Impact Assessment, a copy of which was circulated for Members' information.

In addition, a Rural Needs screening exercise had been completed, a copy of which was circulated for Members' information.

7. Summary

Good Relations Week 2025 would run from Monday 13 October to Sunday 19 October 2025. The 2025 theme is 'Connect'- recognising that the foundation of a better community was built on People, Planet, and Prosperity, all connected by the goal of Peace.

Officers had developed a programme that promoted diversity and inclusion across the Borough.

Further information about all the activities planned for Good Relations Week could be found at www.goodrelationsweek.com

Proposed by Councillor McGrann

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

the 2025 Good Relations Week programme, as outlined, be noted.

NO ACTION

4.6 CP/CP/243 REGIONAL WORKING GROUP APPOINTMENTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the invitations to the Director of Community Development to participate in two regional bodies in relation to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Agenda.

2. Introduction/Background

EVAWG was one of the Programme for Government priorities and the Council had been working in partnership with TEO since the autumn of 2024 to aid delivery against this priority. It was reported to the Committee in November 2024 that the Council's Director of Community Development was the SOLACE NI rep on the TEO EVAWG Oversight Board.

3. Previous Decisions

At the Community Development Committee in November 2024, it was agreed that the request from TEO to work in partnership in relation to the delivery of the EVAWG Strategic Framework and Action Plan be approved.

4. Request to Join Regional Groups

Members were advised that the Director of Community Development as the SOLACE NI Lead for EVAWG had been invited by the Local Government Staff Commission to join the Local Council's Equality and Diversity Group which was chaired by Belfast City Council and had representation from public and voluntary sector organisations.

In addition, the Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Agency had invited the Director to join the EVAWG Cross Sectoral Workplace Forum established in 2024 as a sub-group of the Labour Relations Agency Engagement Forum. The focus of this group was to bring insight into the needs of the local workforce in addressing VAWG.

Both invitations had been accepted by the required deadlines and participation in both groups would support the ongoing delivery of EVAWG actions within the Council.

5. Finance

There were no financial implications associated with participation in both groups.

6. Governance

The Director of Community Development had been invited to join both groups as the SOLACE NI Lead on EVAWG.

7. Summary

The Director of Community Development, who was the SOLACE NI Lead on EVAWG, had accepted invitations to join the Local Council Equality and Diversity Group and the Labour Relations Agency EVAWG Cross Sectoral Workplace Forum and would be attending first meetings in September.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

A Member highlighted that the banners and flags outside Antrim Castle Gardens and particularly those opposite Central Car Park were in poor condition and her concerns were noted.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile
Seconded by Alderman McGrath and agreed that

the following Committee business be taken In Confidence and the livestream and audio recording would cease at this point.

6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

6.1 IN CONFIDENCE CP/CD/289 COMMUNITY FACILITIES – TENANCY RENEWAL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval on a tenancy agreement renewal at the Dunanney Centre Rathcoole.

2. Introduction/Background

There were 8 Community Facilities managed by the Community Development Section were as follows:

- Greystone Community Centre
- Muckamore Community Centre
- Parkhall Community Centre
- Rathenraw Community Centre
- Stiles Community Centre
- Neillsbrook Community Centre
- Dunanney Centre
- Lilian Bland Pavillion

Community Facilities were available for hire by individuals, groups and organisations for a diverse range of activities such childcare, birthday parties, meetings, sport and social activities.

There are a number of rentable offices in the Community Facility Buildings.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Schedule of Charges for hiring Community facilities and tenancy agreements was approved at the January 2025 Community Development Committee. An average inflationary increase to the schedule of charges of

approximately 2.5% was approved and a rental rate of £[REDACTED] per square metre per annum was applied to all Community Facility Tenancy agreements from 1 April 2025.

4. Financial Position/Implication

One tenancy agreement in the Dunanney Centre, Rathcoole, was due for renewal by the organisation in the table below who has requested that they are renewed as follows:

Organisation	Rooms Requested for Rental Renewal	Tenancy Start Date and Term	Rental Income £[REDACTED] sqm (p/a)
Rathcoole Crew	Room 28	1st November 2025 for 1 year	£[REDACTED]

A template tenancy agreement was circulated for Members' information.

5. Summary

There were a number of rentable offices in the Community Facility Buildings which were leased to various organisations under tenancy agreements. All tenancy agreements include rental costs, service charges and utilities.

Renewal of this tenancy agreement in the Dunanney Centre, Rathcoole, would achieve annual rental income of £[REDACTED] per annum.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile
Seconded by Alderman McGrath and agreed that

the renewal of the tenancy agreement with Rathcoole Crew, including keyholder option for Dunanney Centre Rathcoole from 1st November 2025 for 1 year at an annual rental income of £[REDACTED] be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Townsend, Community Facilities Coordinator

6.2 **IN CONFIDENCE** AC/TH/001 THEATRE AT THE MILL REPLACEMENT LIGHTING CAPITAL PROJECT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the Project Initiation Document (PID) for the Theatre at The Mill replacement lighting capital project.

2. Introduction/Background

Theatre at The Mill opened to the public on 30 January 2010 and was celebrating its fifteenth year of operation. It was the Borough's largest performing arts venue with an auditorium capacity of 400 and attracts an audience year-round from across the Borough as well as outside of the area.

Theatre at The Mill like all performing arts venues was heavily impacted by the pandemic but has now fully recovered with performance targets exceeded in 2024/2025.

The lighting system for the theatre was installed at the time of the theatre's construction and covers foyer lighting, dimmable auditorium lighting and programmable specialist stage lighting. The system uses traditional incandescent bulbs.

The system was now reaching the end of its life partly due to its age but also because it is becoming increasingly difficult to replace incandescent bulbs which are being phased out in favour of energy efficient LED systems.

A Project Initiation Document (PID) has been prepared for a Theatre Lighting Replacement Capital Project at an estimated cost of £[REDACTED].

3. Theatre Lighting Replacement Capital Project

A replacement of the Theatre at The Mill lighting system was proposed as a priority in order to ensure the theatre can continue to operate as a high-quality performing arts venue capable of hosting and accommodating a diverse range of high-quality arts and cultural performances and events.

The performance of Theatre at The Mill in 2024/2025 delivered the following results:

- Increase in ticket sales from 37,670 in 2023/2024 to 47,502 in 2024/2025
- Increase in occupancy from 52% in 2023/2024 to 55% in 2024/2025
- Increase in ticket sales from £473,627 in 2023/2024 to £891,283 in 2024/2025

In order to sustain and improve this level of performance it was proposed that the replacement of the theatre lighting be progressed as a capital project for delivery in 2026/2027.

A detailed Project Initiation Document (PID) was circulated for Members' information. If approved, this project would proceed to Stage 1 of the capital projects approval process, leading to the development of an Outline Business Case (OBC).

4. Finance

The estimated cost of the project had been identified as £[REDACTED] and the final cost of the project would be funded by a capital financing over 15 years with capital loan payments estimated at £[REDACTED] per annum on average over 15 years. It was anticipated that once completed the project would achieve annual energy revenue savings for the theatre of £13,000.

5. Governance

If the PID was approved this project will undergo the Council's capital approval process before work commences.

6. Summary

Theatre at The Mill had been operational since January 2010. The theatre lighting system needed to be replaced given its age, future maintenance challenges and opportunity for improved energy efficiency and technological developments. A Project Initiation Document (PID) for the proposed project had been developed for which approval was sought in order to advance this project to Stage 1 of the Council's capital projects approval process.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the Project Initiation Document for the Theatre at The Mill Lighting Replacement Capital Project be approved.

ACTION BY: Ursula Fay, Director of Community Development

6.3 **IN CONFIDENCE** AC/HE/037 **STEEPLE HOUSE AND PARKLAND CAPITAL PROJECT**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval to submit a non-binding Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) as the first stage of a new application for funding support for the development of Steeple Park and Steeple House.

2. Introduction/Background

Steeple Park was a listed historic Garden Demesne located one mile North of Antrim town centre, and extending to approximately 30 acres alongside Antrim Civic Centre. The park, which was extensively used by the local community, contains a Grade 1 listed 10th century monastic steeple round tower in the care of the Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division, as well as the ruins of a Grade 1 listed Victorian / Edwardian mansion house which was the subject of an arson attack in 2019.

The park was the site of a monastic settlement which, according to tradition, was founded in AD 495 by St Aedh, and which was also connected to a nearby Holy Well. The site has significant historical connections to the origins of Antrim, the Battle of Antrim, the Skeffington family of the Massereene and Ferrard estate, and many other important figures and events. The parkland and the ruins of Steeple House were in the care of the Council, and the Council had a statutory obligation to maintain the ruins of the house.

Following the 2019 fire at Steeple House, a number of short-term measures were put in place to protect the ruins from further degradation and to keep the public away from the potentially dangerous site. These measures, which included plastic sheeting to cover the exposed wall heads and fencing around the ruins, was still currently in place.

The development of the Steeple site had been under consideration for a number of years and included at initiation stage within the Council's capital projects programme.

3. Previous Decision of Council

At the Community Planning Committee in June 2022 Members were advised that the development of the parkland element of the project was estimated at £[REDACTED] and it was agreed to appoint an architect to progress the project specification and to submit an application to the NLHF.

It was reported to the Policy and Governance Committee in November 2022 that the Steeple Complex capital project was at initiation stage with the project scope to be developed and NHLF funding for the Parkland element was being explored.

An update on the Steeple Complex Project was reported to the February 2023 Council meeting when Members were advised that the project scope included three distinct 3 elements with indicative costs outlined as follows:

- Parkland: £[REDACTED]
- House: £[REDACTED]
- Outbuildings: £[REDACTED]

Subsequently an update on the Parkland element of the project was reported to the February 2024 Council Meeting when Members were advised that, following more detailed design works by the architect, the estimate of this element of the project had risen to £[REDACTED] and that an application for 70% of this funding had been submitted to the NLHF with an initial offer of £[REDACTED] having been made for a development phase of the Steeple Parkland project.

At the May 2024 Policy and Governance Committee, Members were advised that, based upon the constraints of affordability and requirement for prioritisation, a review of the Capital Programme and Capital Project Management Process had commenced for Members' future consideration.

4. Current Position

The review of the Council's capital programme in its entirety in terms of affordability and prioritisation commenced in mid-2024, and included all elements of the Steeple Complex capital project.

In October 2024 as part of this review Cogent Management Consultants working with Consarc Conservation and Outscape Outdoor Recreation were asked to review the Steeple Complex project in its entirety and produce an outline business case focusing on achieving value for money and including proposals to ensure the Council could discharge its statutory obligations of protecting the House and Outbuildings.

Their expert opinion on the initial project total estimate of £ [REDACTED] was that it was highly likely to rise significantly given unknown factors associated with the House, Outbuildings and access as well as the significant cost inflation experienced across the market in relation to capital projects. Heritage projects in particular being prone to significant upward cost variance.

The outline business case was in the final stages of development and would be presented to Members at the capital projects workshop in November 2025. Throughout this process officers had maintained communications with the NLHF and updated them on proposed revisions to the project scope which in the main had moved from a single focus on the Parkland to include all three elements of the complex. The NLHF had supported this approach and confirmed their recognition of the significant heritage value of this site, in particular the centuries of history contained within the Parkland, but also in relation the House and Outbuildings.

They had advised officers that given the refocus of the project the Council should submit a new application for funding, commencing with an initial Expression of Interest for the revised proposals for the site, which if successful would lead on to an application for up to 70% of the total funding for the project.

5. Finance

A number of cost options for the project were being developed as part of the outline business case to be reported to the Capital Projects workshop. Business case approval through Committee would be required in line with the Council's 5 stage capital projects management process.

The commencement of a new application for funding to the NLHF through the submission of a non-binding Expression of Interest to them for the project had the potential to achieve 70% of funding towards the overall capital cost.

6. Governance

An outline business case for the Steeple Complex project was in the final stages of preparation and would be presented to the Capital Projects Corporate Workshop in November 2025. The outline business case would require Committee approval to move through stage 1 of the capital project management process which would then be followed by stage 2 requiring the development of a full business case, planning and procurement.

7. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

Consideration would be given to Equality and Rural Screening requirements as part of the proposed future report on the Outline Business Case for the Steeple project.

8. Summary

As part of the ongoing review of the Council's Capital Project Programme in terms of affordability and prioritisation an outline business case for the Steeple Complex was in the final stages of preparation in advance of the Capital Projects Corporate Workshop in November 2025.

Given the heritage significance of this project evidenced through a previous successful funding application to the NLHF it was proposed that Officers commence a new funding application for this revised project scope by submission of a non-binding initial Expression of Interest to the NLHF. The submission of an Expression of Interest was a mandatory requirement in advance of any formal application for funding. It was considered prudent to do this at this stage as the potential for funding support for the project would help inform future reports to be taken in line with the Capital Project Management process.

The Director of Community Development confirmed that following the decision on the Expression of Interest, the proposal would be brought forward to a Corporate Workshop on the Capital Programme for further discussion.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the commencement of a new funding application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund through the submission of a non-binding Expression of Interest to them for a revised Steeple Complex project brief, be approved.

ACTION BY: Simon Goldrick, Head of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Events

6.4 IN CONFIDENCE CP/CD/482 DIRECT AWARD CONTRACT – ASBESTOS REMOVAL AT NEILLSBROOK

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to obtain retrospective approval of the direct award for the removal of asbestos from Neillsbrook bonfire site which was within the Neillsbrook Community Centre car park.

2. Removal of Asbestos from Neillsbrook Bonfire Site

Members were advised that a contractor (who was in attendance at the Neillsbrook Bonfire site to support the post-bonfire clean-up of the sand and paving stone base) reported to Council Officers that they had discovered what they believed to be asbestos within the bonfire remains. This was reported to the Waste Management Section, which progressed the matter urgently.

3. Asbestos Removal Direct Award

The Council had a contract in place for the removal of asbestos as well as the removal of bonfire beacons and the associated waste. Following the 11 July bonfire at the car park, Neillsbrook Community Centre, the bonfire Contractor

arrived to remove the sand and slabs and identified possible asbestos in the sand at the site. Due to the significant health and safety risk of asbestos and the accessibility of the site to the public, the Council's appointed asbestos consultant was contacted immediately to test for the presence of the substance.

Once the consultant confirmed that the substance was asbestos, removal was arranged; however, as the asbestos was mixed in the sand, all of the sand, approximately 80 tonnes, was deemed contaminated and had to be removed. The dispersal and mixing of the asbestos throughout the sand indicate that this toxic waste was within the bonfire before the lighting of the bonfire on 11 July.

The cost for the removal of 80 tonnes of sand and the decontamination of the site was £[REDACTED].

Given the urgency of the matter the Council could not adhere to the time limits for a procurement exercise and a direct award for £[REDACTED] to Graham Asset Management was made.

4. Governance

Due to the unforeseeable nature and quantity of the asbestos contamination and the unavoidable urgency for removal due to the significant health and safety risk, the Council could not adhere to the time limits for a procurement process, limited to the £50,000 (excl. VAT) threshold.

The removal and disposal of the contaminated waste was in line with the quoted rates and Officers were content that it represented value for money.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution and the "Scheme of Delegation" section 2(c) – Emergencies and Cases of Urgency, the Chief Executive was permitted to take such measures, including incurring expenditure, as may be required in emergency situations or cases of urgency, without the prior approval of Council.

However, in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023, a direct award to Graham Asset Management Ltd for £[REDACTED] required Council approval, which is retrospectively requested.

5. Summary

Asbestos, a highly toxic and dangerous waste substance was found to have contaminated the entire bonfire sand base at Neillsbrook. Urgent removal of this toxic material by a specialist contractor at a cost of £[REDACTED] was carried out in accordance with Council's Constitution and the "Scheme of Delegation" section 2(c) – Emergencies and Cases of Urgency.

A direct award to Graham Asset Management for this amount was made given that the matter was urgent and required a specialist contractor.

Retrospective approval for this was sought given that it was required under the Council's Constitution and Procurement Act 2023.

The Director of Community Development confirmed that Waste colleagues had followed all statutory reporting but it was unlikely that those responsible would be identified. She further clarified that the area affected was a car park at a Community Centre therefore not sealed off after the bonfire was lit and that the asbestos was only identified during the clean up. She also confirmed that the quantity of sand base laid forms a normal part of Council's ground protection measure at this site.

Proposed by Councillor Burbank
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

in accordance with the Council's Constitution and the "Scheme of Delegation" section 2(c) – Emergencies and Cases of Urgency, and in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023, a direct award to Graham Asset Management Ltd be retrospectively approved at a cost of £[REDACTED].

ACTION BY: Ursula Fay, Director of Community Development

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor McGrann
Seconded by Councillor O'Lone and agreed that

the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 19.19pm

MAYOR

Council Minutes have been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation, and legal advice.