



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND TOWER CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE
ON WEDNESDAY 6 MAY 2026 AT 6.30 PM**

In the Chair	:	Councillor B Webb
Members Present (In person)	:	Aldermen – P Bradley, L Clarke and M Cosgrove Councillors – S Cosgrove, P Dunlop, N Kelly, H Magill and V McWilliam
Members Present (Remote)	:	H Cushinan, M Goodman, A McAuley, A O'Lone and T McGrann
Officers Present (In person)	:	Director of Finance – J Balmer Director of Organisation Development (Interim) – L Johnston Head of Finance – R Murray Head of Organisation Development – L Millar Head of ICT - G Smyth Funding Hub Manager – A Boyle ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson Member Services Officer – C McGrandle

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the May Meeting of the Policy and Governance Committee and reminded all present of recording requirements.

1 APOLOGIES

None.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 CCS/EP/10 INCLUSIVE SUMMER SCHEME PROGRAMME AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) SCHOOLS SUMMER SCHEME FUNDING 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve funding for the Inclusive Summer Scheme Programme and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools Summer Scheme.

2. Council Decision

Council's Equality Action Plan demonstrated its commitment to creating a Borough where all individuals feel respected, represented, and able to participate fully in civic and community life. In addition, the Disability Action Plan featured actions to be achieved in order to promote positive attitudes towards Disabled people and encourage participation by Disabled people in public life.

Furthermore, since April 2018 Council approved the funding of up to £5,000 for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools in the Borough to support equitable access to Summer Schemes and Programmes across the Borough for children and young people with additional needs. This funding was provided from the Accessibility and Inclusion budget.

3. Review of Inclusive Summer Scheme Delivery Model

The Inclusive Summer Scheme programme had been successfully delivered in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation. In Autumn 2025, Mae Murray Foundation proposed that Council run an 'Inclusive Summer Programme for All-abilities'.

In order to achieve this, Mae Murray Foundation recommended that Council expand the partnership provision to include other organisations, such as Sensory Kids NI who could offer their specialist expertise at their premises. The intention was to serve the needs of physically Disabled and Neurodivergent children, as well as children with intellectual disabilities. The model was to provide 'Stay and Play' events whereby parents remain onsite, and depending on the age group of the child, in a different room. This would enable them to be available for any personal care and emergency medication needs but where appropriate, they could avail of leisure facilities, meet other parents/carers or spend time in a quiet space. In addition to reflecting the needs of Disabled children, the Inclusive Summer Scheme had been designed to provide some necessary respite for parents and carers.

4. Proposed Inclusive Summer Scheme Programme 2026

Location	Event	Date	Provider
Antrim Forum Leisure Centre	Stay and Play Tots (0-6) Stay and Play Kids (7-13) Stay and Play Teens (14-18)	15-17 July 2026	Mae Murray Foundation
Mossley Pavillion	Stay and Play Tots (0-6) Stay and Play Kids (7-13) Stay and Play Teens (14-19)	3-5 August 2026	Mae Murray Foundation
Crumlin Leisure Centre	All Age Family Day	28 July 2026	Mae Murray Foundation
Sensory Kids NI, The Junction	Stay and Play (6-10)	6 July 2026 12 August 2026	Sensory Kids NI

In addition to the above inclusive summer scheme offerings, work was ongoing to explore the feasibility of family day/summer scheme provision in a Ballyclare primary school.

5. Financial Implications

The costs associated were:

- The Inclusive Summer Scheme in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation is £17,000.
- The Special Educational Needs (SEN) School Summer Scheme Funding was £25,000 (based on all five schools applying).

All costs were within agreed budget.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam

Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

- a) The allocation of £17,000 for the Inclusive Summer Scheme Programme 2026 be approved.**
- b) The allocation of £25,000 for the Special Educational Needs Schools Summer Scheme 2026 be approved.**

ACTION BY: Claire Webb, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 CCS/EDP/025 DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGN APPLICATIONS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the update on the current status of Dual Language Street Sign applications.

2. Introduction/Background

The Dual Language Street Sign Policy (circulated) was adopted by Council in May 2022. This report provided an update on current applications and sought approval, where required in accordance with the Policy.

3. Applications Update

- Petition received

A new application had been received for Brecart Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3TH and BT41 3PJ. The petition would be verified following a visit to the Electoral Office NI.

- Stage 1 – Petition Verification (Approved at Policy and Governance Committee on 14 April 2026).

Three applications were at this stage. The occupiers who signed the petition had been verified against the Electoral Register and the applications met the required one-third threshold. Now approved, these would progress to the canvass stage after the current Stage 2 canvass exercise had been completed.

Cargin Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3NS
Hollybrook Gardens, Newtownabbey, BT36 3ZS
Loup Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3TW

- Stage 2 – Residents Canvass (For Noting)

Two applications had progressed to this stage. Canvass letters had been issued to occupiers, and the outcome would be reported at the next meeting.

Longlands Walk, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NQ
Longlands Park, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NG

- Stage 3 – Street Sign Installation (For Noting)

No applications were currently at this stage.

4. Map and Costs

Relevant maps and associated costs were circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Dual Language Street Sign update be noted.

NO ACTION

4.2 CCS/EDP/023 DEAF FRIENDLY COUNCIL DfC SIGN LANGUAGE PARTNERSHIP GROUP (SLPG) FUNDING 1

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the 2026 British Sign Language (BSL) training programme update.

2. Background

Council was committed to becoming a Deaf Friendly Council, through the signing of the BSL and ISL Deaf Charter.

An application was submitted to the Department for Communities (DfC) Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG). Subsequently, DfC had offered Council, by formal letter, funding of £10,708 to deliver BSL Level 1 and BSL Level 2 training for Elected Members, Council Staff and Borough Residents.

3. Governance

Following a procurement exercise, a three-year contract was awarded to Ruari Bradley, Sign Language Teacher, to deliver BSL training to Elected Members, Council Staff and Borough Residents on behalf of Council. The current cohort of training was well underway, with positive feedback received and good attendance levels at sessions. Four (4) students dropped out of BSL Level One due to personal reasons and there were eleven (11) remaining students working towards Level One accreditation. The course content included topics such as meeting people, everyday life, personal information, environment and surroundings, and describing things.

There were twelve (12) students working towards BSL Level Two accreditation, and the course allowed learners to participate in longer and more varied conversations than at Level One. The content included everyday life, eating and drinking, spending and shopping, travel and holidays.

Following completion of the course and accreditation, a presentation of certificates would be arranged, and a social media post would be shared to promote Council's Deaf Friendly and inclusive ethos.

Members were asked to note that the Accessibility and Inclusion team intended to submit a new application to DfC for funding when the SLPG scheme reopened in Summer 2026. The current programme of training was vastly oversubscribed, with a particularly high level of interest from community applicants. Therefore, a waiting list was being developed for use if Council were successful in its grant application to roll out a fresh programme of training.

Proposed by Alderman Bradley
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the 2026 British Sign Language training programme update be noted.

NO ACTION

4.3 FI/FIN/9 PROMPT PAYMENT PERFORMANCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend Members to note the Council's quarterly prompt payment performance.

2. Introduction/Background

The Department for Communities (DfC) issued revised guidance (Local Government Circular 19/2016) on prompt payments and the recording of invoice payments in November 2016. This guidance requested councils to record specific performance targets of 10 working days and 30 calendar days and to continue a cycle of quarterly reporting on prompt payment performance by Councils to the DfC and its publication on their website.

3. Prompt Payment Performance

Council's prompt payment performance for the period **1 January to 31 March 2026** was set out below:

During the above period, Council paid 5,803 invoices totalling £21,101,169.

Council paid 5,238 invoices within the 30 calendar days target (90.3%).

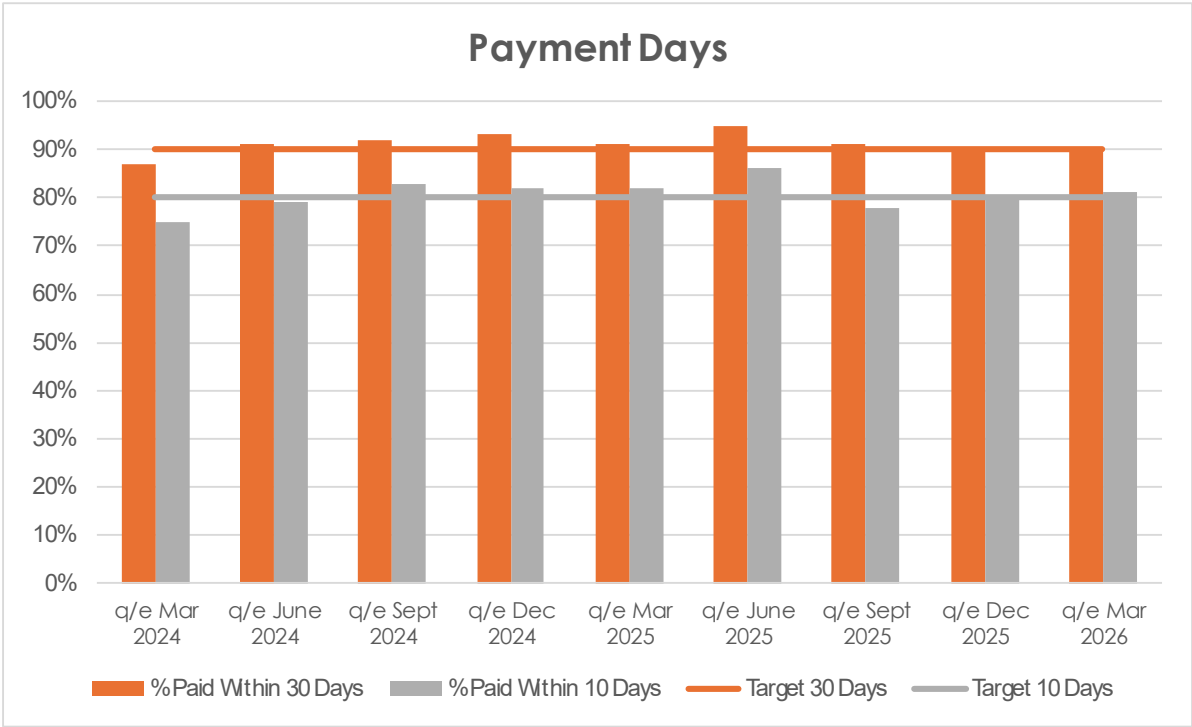
Council paid 4,708 invoices within the 10 working days target (81.1%).

Council paid 565 invoices outside of the 30 days target (9.7%).

This compared to previous quarterly results over the past two years as below:

Period	Total Number of Invoices Paid	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Target		90%	80%
q/e 31 March 2024	5,776	87%	75%
q/e 30 June 2024	5,533	91%	79%
q/e 30 September 2024	4,871	92%	83%
q/e 31 December 2024	4,849	93%	82%
q/e 31 March 2025	6,787	91%	82%
q/e 30 June 2025	4,891	95%	86%
q/e 30 September 2025	4,992	91%	78%
q/e 31 December 2025	5,644	90%	80%
q/e 31 March 2026	5,803	90%	81%

This performance was shown graphically below:



Both targets were met during the quarter.

The 10-day target had now been achieved for six out of the past seven quarters and the 30-day target had been achieved for the past eight consecutive quarters.

Overall, both targets had been achieved for the whole financial year to the end of December with 81% of invoices paid within 10 days and 92% within 30 days.

Invoices in Period	Invoices Paid 1-10 Days	Invoices Paid in less than 30 Days
21,330	17,315	19,547
	Invoices Paid 1-10 days	Invoices Paid less than 30 days
	81.2%	91.6%

The monthly performance for the financial year to date was shown overleaf:



Staff within the Finance section continue to work with all departments across Council and with the software provider to ensure that the targets continue to be met and improved as much as possible.

Service improvements had included:

- Additional reporting capability to monitor performance
- Staff training/refresher sessions
- Process review for high volume suppliers
- Introduction of a new process to scan invoices and send to Council officers for action or to return invoices to the supplier for more information.

The prompt payment performance for councils in Northern Ireland was published quarterly by the Department for Communities (DfC). The prompt payment performance for the quarter ended December 2025 was circulated; the Council's performance for Quarter 3 of 2025/26 against the average performance for the other Councils for the latest available quarter was set out in the table below:

Council	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Antrim & Newtownabbey BC (Quarter 4 25/26)	90%	80%
All Councils (Quarter 3 25/26)	93%	72%

4. Supplier Balances

	March 2026	December 2025
	£	£
Creditors Control Account	666,963	853,355
% of quarterly spend	3.16%	5.00%

The outstanding amount due to suppliers would fluctuate markedly

depending on the timing of payment, invoice value and timelines of verification.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Council's quarterly prompt payment performance report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.4 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 12: APRIL 2025 TO MARCH 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Directorates reporting to the Policy and Governance Committee and for the whole Council for Period 12 April 2025 to March 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

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

The budget report for Period 12 did not include adjustments required to arrive at the final financial position of Council for the 2025/26 financial year. These adjustments included final accruals of expenditure incurred and grants and debts invoiced after 31 March 2026, contributions to or from reserves, and prepayments of expenditure and income.

The final financial position for the year should be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee in June 2026.

3. Summary

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

As at period 12:

The Finance and Governance Directorate had a favourable variance of 297k, or 6.9%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

Excluding Redundancy costs accounted for in the 2025/26 financial year, the Organisation Development Directorate had a favourable variance of £137k, or 5.45%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period. Redundancy costs of £1.7m had been included in the period 12 results. Officers had requested a Capitalisation Direction from the Department of Communities to spread this cost over the next four financial years.

Overall (including the full impact of redundancy costs)0 Council had a favourable variance of £475k or 0.7% against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

This report also included the overall financial performance of the Council, including a summary of the financial performance of each Directorate.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.5 FI/ICT/5 ICT HELPDESK AND PROJECT UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on ICT Helpdesk activity and performance over the last year, and to provide a progress update on key ICT projects currently underway.

2. Introduction

The ICT Department was structured to provide both operational support and project delivery across the Council. This included a service desk/helpdesk function providing day-to-day user support, alongside technical teams responsible for core infrastructure, networks and systems, and specialist capability covering cyber security and governance.

The ICT team worked closely with service areas to maintain and improve digital services, supported staff in delivering front-line and back-office functions, and progressed priority technology initiatives (including Smart Working and wider digital change).

A report was circulated, which covers the ICT helpdesk statistics and core ICT project delivery.

Proposed by Alderman Bradley
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

Members note this report on the update of the ICT Helpdesk and ICT Projects.

NO ACTION

Councillor McGrann joined the meeting remotely at this point.

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS (AORB)

As this was the last meeting of the current term as Chairperson for the Committee, Councillor Webb thanked the Vice Chairperson, Members of the Committee and Officers for their assistance and advice during the last year.

Members extended their thanks to the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Officers for their leadership and support throughout the year.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed

that the following Committee business be taken In Confidence and the livestream and audio recording would cease.

6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

6.1 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/ICT/4 REMOTE ACCESS SOLUTION

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the procurement and implementation of a modern remote access solution to improve Council's ability to support staff working from home and other remote locations. The proposed investment would deliver a secure, resilient and user-friendly remote access platform for approximately 320 regular home workers, improving productivity, business continuity and cyber security.

2. **Introduction**

Council had an increased requirement to enable staff to work effectively from home and other remote locations. As Smart Working was progressed as a pilot, no dedicated remote access infrastructure investment was made at the time, and Council had continued to rely on a basic VPN approach.

There were currently around 320 users who regularly work from home and required dependable access to Council systems. As remote working became business-as-usual, Council was required to invest in a secure, resilient and user-friendly remote access platform which would support staff productivity and protect Council data.

The proposed solution, FortiSASE, would deliver a consistent and improved remote access user experience designed to be as simple as possible for end users (easy and reliable sign-in). FortiSASE would also complement the Council's existing critical security infrastructure by strengthening access controls and providing improved monitoring and reporting, giving ICT a more comprehensive view of activity across the network and supporting faster detection and response.

The full business case for the Remote Access Solution was circulated for Members' consideration.

3. Options Considered

The business case considered two options:

Option 1 – Status Quo (Do Nothing / Basic VPN)

Continue with the existing basic VPN remote access approach, with no material change to user experience, resilience or security monitoring. While this option would minimise change in the short term, it did not address usability issues, resilience/business continuity gaps, or the need for improved security controls and visibility as remote and hybrid working expanded.

Option 2 – FortiSASE Remote Access Solution (Preferred Option)

Procure and implement FortiSASE as a modern remote access solution to provide a simple and reliable sign-in experience alongside stronger security controls, improved monitoring and reporting, and a supportable platform for smart working. This option would improve resilience and business continuity for staff working remotely and strengthen Council's cyber security posture by applying consistent controls, regardless of user location.

The preferred option arising from the business case was Option 2 – FortiSASE Remote Access Solution.

4. Pricing

Indicative costs associated with each option were summarised below.

Costs	Option 1	Option 2
Installation Costs	£nil	██████
Year 0 - 4 Costs (pa)	£nil	██████
Total Project Costs (5 Years)	£nil	██████

Costs were based on an upfront implementation charge and a fixed annual charge over a 5-year term.

The preferred option required an upfront implementation charge and ongoing annual revenue costs, but would deliver improved remote access usability and reliability for staff, stronger security controls and monitoring, and improved resilience and supportability for smart working.

The preferred option would also expect to deliver efficiency savings through reduced ICT support time spent responding to and troubleshooting remote access connectivity issues, and by reducing lost productivity for users when they experience connection problems.

5. Procurement

The proposed solution would be procured via a Government Commercial Agency Framework (GCA, previously CCS). This Framework had been publicly advertised in accordance with the procurement regulations. The tenders were evaluated on the basis of quality (75%), social value (10%) and cost (15%). The contract would be let under the standard terms and conditions associated with the Framework, as set out in the relevant documentation.

The use of the framework would provide a compliant and efficient route to market, align with procurement regulations, and support value for money and governance requirements.

6. Financial Implications

The proposed investment had a total 5-year cost of £[REDACTED], comprising £[REDACTED] in upfront implementation costs and £[REDACTED] in revenue costs (£[REDACTED] per year for five years). The procurement would be fully funded from existing approved budgets, supported by savings realised on other ICT procurements, with no requirement for additional funding.

The Head of ICT clarified queries in relation to the proposed Remote Access Solution and confirmed that it would enhance existing security and monitoring. He also confirmed that the proposed system was widely used across the public sector.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley
Seconded by Alderman Bradley and agreed that

- a) **Option 2 – FortiSASE Remote Access Solution, as outlined in the attached business case be approved; and**
- b) **the award of a contract for a new Remote Access Solution, procured via the Government Commercial Agency Framework (GCA, previously CCS) in line with the tendered rates and indicative costs for Option 2, detailed in this report be approved.**

ACTION BY: Graham Smyth, Head of ICT

6.2 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/FIN/051 GRANT FINDER SERVICE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to approve a business case that explores a Grant Finder Service which identifies funding opportunities for Council, community and voluntary organisations, businesses and individuals to maximise external funding opportunities.
Within the business case, Option 3 was identified as the preferred option of delivery method. The business case was circulated for Members' reference.

2. Introduction/Background

In April 2024, Council approved the establishment of a Grant Funding Unit to deliver the following key functions:

- Management and Administration of Councils Grant Funding – to operate as a central support service by delivering the management and administration of all the Councils Grant Funding Programmes.
- Business Support – to provide business support for the specialist funding programmes, such as SEUPB Peace Plus.
- Securing Funding – to secure increased levels of funding to support the delivery of Council Corporate and Business Plans.
- External engagement – to develop and manage external working relationships and support organisations and community groups to source additional funding.

In order to support the key functions of the Grant Funding Unit, a grant finder service had been identified as a method that would assist Officers to secure funding that supported the delivery of the Council Corporate and Business Plans and that also supported organisations and community groups to source funding.

3. Business Case

At present, funding information was fragmented, time-consuming to source, and inconsistently shared, which led to missed opportunities and reduced impact. The proposed service would provide a centralised, user-friendly platform which would allow Council officers, businesses, community groups, and individuals to easily search, filter, and track relevant funding opportunities. It aligned with strategic priorities such as economic growth, community wellbeing, and improved service delivery, while also supporting better coordination and engagement with external funders.

Option 3 - Implementing the Grant Finder Service would be the preferred option, as it effectively met the project's objectives and would deliver meaningful benefits. Unlike Options 1 and 2, which would rely on existing or enhanced manual processes.

Option 3 would significantly improve access to funding, increase efficiency, reduce duplication of effort, and provide strategic oversight. It would promote inclusivity by giving smaller or less experienced organisations equal access to opportunities. Although it would involve additional cost and some reliance on third-party systems, these risks would be considered manageable and were outweighed by the substantial gains in service quality, funding success, and alignment with Council priorities.

4. Procurement

Council's preferred route to market for the proposed Grant Finder Service would be procurement via a Government Commercial Agency (GCA, formerly CCS) Framework. The use of this established Framework would ensure adherence to public sector procurement regulations and Council's internal governance requirements, while reducing procurement timescales and associated risk. The Framework would enable access to pre-qualified suppliers capable of delivering resilient, secure and scalable software solutions, while ensuring value for money and contractual flexibility to accommodate future changes in service demand.

As this project was partially funded by SEUPB PeacePlus, there was a requirement to adhere to their procurement guidelines as well. Based on current guidance, utilisation of the framework was a compliant route to market. However, Council sought confirmation of their approval. Where this approval was not received, an alternative route to market may be considered, but could result in increased costs of up to 20%.

5. Financial implications

Full revenue provision had been made for **Option 3** in the 2026/27 budgets for this service.

The total estimated project cost was £[REDACTED] which included both capital and revenue costs. The estimated initial capital cost for building the platform is £[REDACTED], while annual revenue costs were estimated at £[REDACTED] per annum, which covered both Council and community access to the service. Over a three-year period, this would bring the estimated total cost to £[REDACTED].

A significant portion of this cost would be offset by PEACE funding, through the Community Capacity Building programme contributing £[REDACTED] towards the overall cost, with an estimated net cost to the Council of £[REDACTED] over three years.

6. Summary

Option 3 offered the best balance of cost, impact, and risk, making it the most effective to meet the project objectives.

In response to a Member's query in relation to approval for the project, the Funding Hub Manager confirmed that funds had been allocated to the project through the Community Development Peace Plus Action Plan to support the Grant Finder Service for a period of eighteen months, with Council assuming responsibility for costs thereafter.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

a) Option 3 within the circulated business case be approved.

- b) Officers were authorised to procure and award a contract for a Grant Finder Service via the Government Commercial Agency Framework (GCA, previously CCS), or suitable approved alternative route, in line with the tendered rates and indicative costs for Option 3 detailed in this report.**

ACTION BY: Anna Boyle, Funding Unit Manager

Councillor Goodman joined the meeting remotely at this point.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Alderman Clarke

Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed

that the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence at this point.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 6.48 pm.

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.