

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Thursday, 26th November, 2020

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

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

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Kingston declared an interest in relation to item 2a – Covid-19 Christmas Response Funding, in that he worked on a part-time basis for the Forward South Partnership, one of the nine strategic partners referred to within the report, and left the meeting whilst the matter was being discussed.

Restricted Items

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

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

Covid-19 Christmas Response Funding

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that the Council, at its meeting on 19th November, in passing a motion on Food Poverty, had agreed to create a fund of £300,000 to provide additional and holistic support to those who were in need this Christmas. It had agreed that the fund would be distributed on the following basis:

- £150,000 to the Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal; and
- £150,000 to be shared across the Council's third sector partners for bespoke and targeted support programmes, with any un-utilised funding from this provision reverting to the Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal.

He informed the Members that, since that decision, the Department for Communities had, in recognising the high level of demand for food, indicated its intention to allocate to the Council an additional £505,000, subject to the receipt of a final letter of offer.

He provided details of the significant financial investment and other activities which the Council and its various partners had provided at a community level in response to Covid-19 and provided an overview of four options for the allocation of the aforementioned amounts, which had been based upon discussions at the meeting of the Party Leaders on 20th November.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

- i. to adopt option 4 within the report, that is, to allocate funding of £150,000 to the existing nine strategic area community partners across the City, as set out in option 1, based on the allocation method of 50% population and 50% need, using multiple deprivation as a proxy, and as outlined below:

| Area | Total £ |
|--------------|----------------|
| North | 37,200 |
| South | 25,950 |
| East | 35,925 |
| West | 40,200 |
| Shankill | 10,725 |
| Total | 150,000 |

- ii. that £100,000 of the funding being provided by the Department for Communities be allocated at risk, subject to due diligence, on the same allocation basis used for the distribution of the £150,000, to the five areas listed in the table above and that thematic groups be considered as part of the distribution of the remaining DfC funding;

- iii. that a special meeting be held to receive an update on the outworkings of the funding which had been distributed and to decide on how the remaining Department for Communities funding would be allocated;
- iv. based on the preferred option, to delegate authority to the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services to make operational decisions relating to the re-allocation of the preferred funding approach, to include making awards (in advance of final funding agreements being signed) and re-allocating money within the area context, if agreed by local groups; and
- v. in accordance with Standing Order 47 (a) (2) (c), that the aforementioned decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council's or the public's interest.

**Council Assets Rental Holiday and
St. George's Market – Financial Implications**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th November, it had considered a report outlining requests which had been received on behalf of businesses operating within the units in St. George's Market and from stallholders therein to waive rental fees for a three-month period, in light of the trading difficulties which they were experiencing as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee had agreed to defer the report to allow for an analysis of the cost to the Council of waiving, for a two-week and a four-week period, the rental fees for those businesses within its estate which would be adversely affected by the imposition of the further restrictions which had been announced by the Northern Ireland Executive on 19th November and how that cost would be met.

The Director of Finance and Resources provided a breakdown of the number of leases across the Council's estate, together with the cost of providing a two week and four week rental holiday for all of those businesses. He explained that many of them could remain open, as they were exempt from the current Covid-19 restrictions, and that those which had to close would be able to avail of government support schemes. All leaseholders had already availed of a three-month rental holiday in Quarter 1, which had not been universally granted by other public and private sector landlords. He added that the Council's Estates Team would work to ensure that any business in difficulty was made aware of the support available to enable them to adapt to the new business environment and concluded by stressing that the Council could be subject to a legal challenge, should it decide to waive fees for some businesses and not for others.

During discussion, a Member stated that it would be beneficial to receive financial information specifically for those businesses within the Council's asset base which would be required to close under the latest restrictions and suggested that the report be deferred until that was provided. There was general consensus around this proposal.

In addition, the Director referred to the request to waive stallholders' fees for a further three months. There was a discussion around deferring this also, as the Market was about to close for two weeks due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

After further discussion, it was

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

That the Committee agrees to waive the rental fees for stallholders in St. George's market and to defer the request relating to the units to allow for further information to be provided.

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

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer both requests until its next available meeting to allow for the additional information to be provided.

Recruitment of Climate Commissioner

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that Mrs. Grainia Long, Commissioner for Resilience, would be leaving the Council early in 2021 to take up a position within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

She reported that Mrs. Long had been appointed on a temporary basis and that her post had been funded externally. It was now proposed that a new post of Climate Commissioner be created by the Council, with the aim of providing a continued focus on the work of the Climate Change Working Group, the Belfast Climate Commission and the Resilience Board. The Commissioner would be appointed on a permanent basis and would be funded through existing Council budgets.

She provided an overview of the recruitment process and associated timeline and, accordingly, recommended that the Committee:

- i. approve the creation and recruitment of the post of Climate Commissioner, as outlined; and
- ii. agree that the selection panel comprise the Chairperson of the Committee (or her nominee), together with two Members of the Committee, not represented by the Chairperson, the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of City and Organisational Strategy.

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that the Democratic Unionist Party and the Green Party each nominate a Member to sit on the selection panel.

Minutes of Meeting of Party Group Leaders

In advance of the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders of 20th November being presented to the Committee on 18th December for approval, the Chief Executive drew the Members' attention to the fact that, in light of the most recent Covid-19 restrictions announced by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Party leaders had agreed that:

- i. the Christmas Animation Programme in the grounds of the City Hall would now commence on Saturday, 12th December and would run until Sunday 10th January; and
- ii. the Council would carry out no enforcement action against large essential retail shops (in excess of 280 m²), across the City, should they choose to open or deliver on a Sunday from 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. The arrangement would be in place from Sunday, 22nd November to Sunday, 10th January. Smaller essential retail shops could continue to trade for up to twenty-four hours.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Operational Issues

Standing Order 14 – Submission of Minutes

In accordance with Standing Order 14, the Committee agreed, as the meeting had been held later than seven clear days before the meeting of the Council, that the minutes be submitted to the Council on 1st December for ratification.

Chairperson