

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 21st June, 2022

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillor Murray (In the Chair);
Councillors Bower, Canavan, Corr,
Donnelly, de Faoite, Flynn, Garrett,
Maghie, McAteer, McCusker,
O'Hara and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Divisional Solicitor;
Mrs. C. Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mrs. A. Hargey, Community Council Support Officer;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

External attendance:

Belfast Youth Forum: Madeline Wilson;
Barry Sejoud;
Kaila Patterson;
Laura Blackledge; and
Tomas Murphy.

Appointment of Chairperson

In the absence of the both the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, it was agreed that Councillor Murray would Chair the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor McMullan, Deputy Chairperson, Councillor Bunting, and Councillors Cobain, Magee and Newton.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Canavan, Flynn, Garrett and McAteer declared an interest in agenda item 2 (b) Bright Lights Event at Botanic Gardens as they had either accepted or indicated that they had accepted complimentary tickets for the 2021/22 event.

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Last Meeting

The Members were informed that this would be Ms. A. Hargey's last meeting in her role as Youth Council Support Officer as she was leaving the Council to take up a new position at Queen's University Belfast as the local co-ordinator for their Queen's Community and Place, Social Charter.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked her for her service and wished her well in her new role.

Congratulations

The Chairperson extended congratulations to the Chairperson, Councillor McMullan, on the recent birth of his daughter Olive.

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 2 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 on the following 4 items as, due to their nature, 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.

Request for the use of CS Lewis Square for a Music Festival

The Committee were advised of the details of a late request that had been received seeking permission to host a live, outdoor music festival as part of the 2022 Eastside Arts Festival at CS Lewis Square.

The Committee granted authority to to Eastside Arts, a project of Eastside Partnership, to host a "Live @ CS Lewis Square" music festival at the Civic Square from 11th – 14th August 2022 and delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to ensure the following:

- to negotiate a fee where appropriate which recognised the costs to Council and endeavoured to minimise any negative impact on the immediate area and take account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Council's Commercial Manager; and
- to negotiate satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement to be prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around 'set up' and take down' periods, and booking amendments, subject to:

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- The organisers resolving any operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
- Compliance with Coronavirus restrictions in place at the time of the event;
- the organisers meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service including the terms and conditions of the Park's Entertainment Licence

The Members noted that the above recommendations were taken as a pre-policy position, in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Council's Commercial team.

Consideration of Bright Lights Event

The Committee considered further the use of the Botanic Gardens for the Bright Lights event and:

It was

Proposed by Councillor O'Hara; and
Seconded by Councillor de Faioite that

“The Committee agree to amend its decision of 9th February, 2021 for the use of the Botanic Gardens up to December 2024 and retract the granting of permission to use Botanic Park to host the Bright Lights event in 2022.”

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

Belfast City Youth Council Agenda

The Committee was advised that representatives from the Belfast City Youth Council (BCYC) were in attendance to provide an update in relation to the work of the Council.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed the representatives to the meeting. It was noted that a number of the Youth Council Members would be addressing the Committee, whilst others were in attendance remotely to watch proceedings.

Unison Presentation on Free School Meals Campaign

The Chairperson also welcomed to the meeting Mr. J. P. Clayton and Ms. A. Taggart, representing Unison.

The representatives thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present regarding its 'Free School Meals for All Campaign'.

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Mr. Clayton commenced by providing an overview of the aspirations of the campaign, which was to achieve universal, free, nutritious school meals for all. He outlined the current provision, along with detail in respect of the current eligibility for free meals which was based on social security benefits and income thresholds.

The Members were advised of the benefits of the provision of free school meals, notably, having a positive impact on child behaviour, concentration, health and learning outcomes as well as helping to reduce the financial burden for families in poverty.

Ms. Taggart advised that Unison members who worked in school catering settings were consistently raising and highlighting the lack of free meals as a significant issue affecting children and that staff were often having to supplement children's lunches. It was noted that many children in poverty were not in receipt of free school meals, with parents often struggling to pay for school meals as they were just above the income threshold, whilst others did not want their child to be stigmatised by being seen to be taking free school meals. She advised that Unison members in schools regularly reported the impact of hunger on children.

Mr. Clayton drew reference to the Department of Education Review of Free School Meals and Uniform Grants that had been announced by the then Education Minister, Minister Weir, in May 2021. He advised that, yesterday, the current Education Minister, Minister McIlveen, had announced a 20% increase in the school uniform grant which would provide some assistance to a number of low-income families but unfortunately did not address the free school meals issue.

The representative concluded by asking the Council to endorse the introduction of universal free school meals within the new Executive Programme for Government and to commit to supporting Unison's campaign.

Several of the Members welcomed the work undertaken by Unison and reiterated the need for universal free school meals.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation, and they left the meeting.

The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority and Minister for Education to endorse Unison's campaign for Free Schools Meals and also to seek an update in respect of its antipoverty campaign.

**Post Covid Recovery and ways to help Young
People - Madeline Wilson and Barry Sejour**

The representatives of the BCYC presented the details of a Post Covid Recovery Campaign that it wished to launch during its term, they advised that the campaign would consist of two parts.

The first would aim to tackle the isolation that young people had experienced throughout the pandemic by connecting them with volunteering opportunities within Belfast. BCYC planned to organise a young people's event, possibly in the City Hall, which would showcase volunteer opportunities in Belfast, highlight the benefits of volunteering and provide

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an opportunity for young people to sign up to volunteer roles in the community. The representative explained that, as a part of this work, the Youth Council aimed to map out young people's current contribution to volunteering in Belfast and to focus on building on this.

The Members were advised that the second phase of the Covid campaign aimed to explore how the pandemic had impacted on young people's education, mental and physical health and family and social life. It aimed to focus in on specific groups such as minority ethnic young people, young people with disabilities and young carers.

The representatives advised that the Youth Council planned to carry out a research project that would engage with young people on the issue and identify youth focused solutions to any issues that were highlighted. In terms of progressing the campaign, a scoping exercise of current research projects on young people and the pandemic would be carried out to ensure that the proposed project was unique and had merit.

A Member suggested that the BCYC Members liaise with the Elected Members from specific District Electoral Areas (DEAs) who could help provide advice and guidance as to youth groups and organisations that could be included in the consultation.

The Members of the Committee discussed the difficulties and disruption that young people had experienced during the pandemic, drawing reference to their own constituents and families. Specific discussion focused on the upheaval and disruption that young people had experienced for such a prolonged period to their education, in particular, no continuity with online study and the disruption and lack of clarity around this year's exams.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager commended the proposed project and suggested that the Youth Council should present their intent to the Belfast Area Outcomes Group, the city partnership working to improve outcomes for the CYP. She stated that she felt the community and statutory members of the BAOG partners would be keen to help inform the project and support subsequent project recommendations.

Following discussion, the Members of the Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to seek clarity on its processes regarding last minute exam changes that had come about as a direct result of the pandemic and to also ascertain if any special measure were being implemented to help those young people who might not have achieved expected grades as a direct result of the pandemic.

**The Impact of Prejudice on Young
People – Kaila Patterson**

The representative advised the Committee that the BCYC were keen to progress a project that would explore prejudice in Belfast. She advised that, at present, they were unsure of the specific focus of this project. She explained that during initial discussions the themes of race, religion and gender had regularly arisen, however, the BCYC members were aware that research work had already been undertaken on many of these areas. As a starting point, the members planned to explore what projects already existed in Belfast, with the aim of identifying gaps that could be filled.

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The representative advised that, given that ideas for this project were less well developed than the covid recovery campaign, the BCYC were keen to seek guidance and advice from the Elected Members about potential project ideas and initiatives to help develop the project and form the future campaign.

The Committee welcomed the proposed programme of works to explore prejudice in Belfast and suggested that these works should include:

- investigating the prejudice of young people in the LGBTQ Community; and
- consideration of the impact of social media and technology in spreading prejudice amongst young people;

It was agreed that, given that the campaign would be focussing on prejudice and the themes of race, religion and gender, the Council's Shared City Partnership be consulted for its input.

In addition, the Youth Council Members were encouraged to link directly with the Political Youth Champions to discuss the campaign further.

**Queens University Belfast 'RADICAL'
Research Project – Laura Blackledge**

The Committee was reminded that, at the December 2019 meeting of the People and Communities Committee, permission had been granted for the Council to act as a stakeholder in the Queen's University 'RADICAL' research project (Respect and Disrespect in Children and Adolescents Lives) and to be named as the official city partner organisation in the grant application.

The representative explained that the project, facilitated by QUB, sought to understand how respect, lack of respect, and disrespect were theorised, understood, and experienced by children and young people in the City of Belfast. The overall aim was to generate a rich understanding of the concept and experiences of respect and disrespect from children and young people's perspectives, with a view to generating better relationships among children and their peers. The research would also seek to inform the delivery of public and community-based services which children and young people engage with daily in the City.

The Members noted that the BCYC were acting as the Children and Young People's Advisory Group (CYPAG) on this project and that QUB had already held pre-grant application consultations with them. QUB had already helped shape the study and had informed on areas and issues of importance,

The Committee was advised that unfortunately the Covid pandemic had halted the application process in early 2020, but QUB had now resumed engagement with staff and young people to shape the final stages of the application.

The representative advised that, as part of the process, the Council would be asked to submit an official letter of support/endorsement for the project.

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The Committee noted the ongoing work and partnership arrangements for the 'RADICAL' project and agreed that, in due course, an official letter of support endorsing Belfast City Youth Council's role as the Children and Young People's Advisory Group could be submitted to Queen's University Belfast.

Youth Champions – Tomas Murphy

The representative reminded the Members that it had previously been agreed that each Political Party would nominate a Political Youth Champion to take a leadership role to further improve communications and cooperation between Councillors, officers and the Youth Council

He advised that the Youth Council Members were keen to establish the Political Youth Champions Group but several of the political nominations were currently outstanding. He reported that the current Elected Members appointed were as follows:

Sinn Féin – Councillor McCann
PUP- Councillor Hutchinson
Green Party – Councillor O'Hara

During discussion the following appointments were made:

SDLP – Councillor de Faoite
Alliance – Councillor Bower

It was noted that the outstanding nominees for People Before Profit and the DUP would be confirmed through the Party Group Leaders and that officers would update the BCYC accordingly.

General Discussion

During discussion the Youth Council Members highlighted several issues to the Elected Members which, amongst others, included accessibility to parks and inclusive playgrounds, sectarian graffiti, and the cost of school uniforms.

The Elected Members encouraged the young people to contact them directly to discuss any issues.

Noted.

Chairperson