

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

Thursday 11th August 2022

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Samuel Nelson
Alderman George Dorrian
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Councillor Donal Lyons

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson, Alderman Sonia Copeland, Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, Councillor Michael Long

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
Christine Sheridan, Head of Human Resources (for Items 1 & 3)
David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 5 & 6)
John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy (for Item 6)
Cathy Reynolds, Director City Regeneration & Development (for Item 6)

1. Interim Arrangements

The Chief Executive and Head of Human Resources outlined the proposed interim management arrangements for the post of Director of Finance and Resources following the recent recruitment process. Members noted that a report with the detail discussed will be submitted to August SP&R for consideration.

2. Finance Update

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance & Resources presented the Quarter 1 financial outturn for 2022/23 and advised a report will be brought to August SP&R outlining the Quarter 1 financial position for the Council. He also provided an update following the June SP&R Committee for the remainder of the non recurrent reallocation of the year end surplus and a report on the issues discussed will be presented to August SP&R Committee for consideration. In relation to an issue raised, Members also discussed the current market volatility on utility costs and the rise in inflation and the impact on Council Financing. Detailed discussion followed on the many challenges involved and potential funding options for future years. In light of these challenges Members noted that further work was still required on estimates for 2023/24, a report will be brought to a future SP&R Committee.

A query was raised in relation to utility costs for Community Organisations and how Council could explore potential mechanisms to support community organisations struggling to pay overhead costs given the recent significant increases. The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that a report had recently been considered by the August P&C Committee and that work was ongoing. The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance & Resources advised that this will be included in the Non-Recurrent Re-allocations report.

3. Update on engagement with Trade Unions on Cost of Living Proposals

The Head of Human Resources updated the Forum on ongoing discussions with the Trade Union Group in relation to the cost of living crisis. She outlined for Members the detail of the proposals put forward and the Trade Union response following the meeting. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the costings involved in relation to the proposals being considered. A report will be submitted to August SP&R Committee for review and consideration and this item will also be included in the Non-Recurrent Re-allocations report.

4. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources updated Members on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal including an update on the Contracts for Funding which are required for each of the capital projects. He advised that work to formalise permanent structures and resources to allow the Council to carry out its role as Lead authority and Accountable Body has now been completed. It was noted that there was a revision to the Financial Agreement presented to Members at the June Committee and that it would be included in the update report to August S&R Committee.

5. Arrangements to deal with removal of bonfire materials

The Chief Executive advised that he had received correspondence from the Department for Infrastructure in relation to the programmes of work associated with bonfires. Members discussed the correspondence received and agreed that the Chief Executive continues to engage with the Department in agreeing a way forward. A Member raised an issue in relation to a Bonfire site on council owned land and the Chief Executive noted the issue raised.

6. City Centre All Party Working Group

The Director of City Regeneration & Development provided an update on the proposals for a City Centre All Party Working Group, and the emerging wider city centre governance structures. She advised that the draft terms of reference for the working group had been

circulated in advance to the Forum. A Member suggested an addition to the terms in relation to policy innovation and it was agreed that this would be added in advance of August SP&R Committee. It was noted that the report will recommend that membership of the group would be Party Group Leaders or their nominee.

The Director City & Organisational Strategy provided an update in relation to the work ongoing with the Strategic Leadership group - Complex Lives and outlined the work underway to develop and embed a new approach to supporting vulnerable individuals within the city. A report will be brought to August SP&R which will include a detailed update.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services then provided an overview on the work that has taken place in recent weeks in terms of cleansing within the City Centre. A detailed update will be presented to the Cleanliness Task Force at its next meeting.

In response to some issues raised by Members the Chief Executive stressed to Members that he is fully committed to addressing the short and longer term challenges facing the city centre. He advised that the Working Group will be action led and will make recommendations to the relevant committee for approvals.

7. Planning Update

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in August.

8. AOB

Forth Meadow Signage

The Chief Executive advised that a request for Irish language signage to be installed at Forth Meadow Community Greenway had been received. He advised that the request needs to be reviewed in line with the letter of offer and equality screening process and an update will be brought back to Party Group Leaders in due course.

Stratagem – Delivering Effective Government Conference – request for sponsorship

Members noted a request for Sponsorship received from Stratagem for the Council to sponsor a forthcoming conference 'Future of Politics: Delivering Effective Government' to be

held in September 2022. A report will be brought to August SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

Lagan Gateway Update

The Chief Executive provided an update in relation to the Lagan Gateway project following a naming competition for the new bridge at Stranmilis which went out for consultation in May 2022. Party Group Leaders had been updated on the outcome of the consultation at the September meeting of the Forum. Discussions have been ongoing since then and the Chief Executive detailed to Members the preferred public option which sits outside the Naming Policy. A report will be brought to August SP&R Committee for Members to consider if they wish to step outside of the Naming Policy on this occasion.

Illumination Requests

The Chief Executive advised he had received a request from a Member to light up City Hall for Development Language Disorder Awareness Day on 14 October 2022. He also advised that a Member had requested that the illumination of City Hall for Pride and raising of the rainbow flag on City Hall aligns to the same date as the Pride Parade going forward.

Members noted both requests would be agreed under the Chief Executive's delegated authority.

Joint Leadership Session PGL's/CMT

Members discussed one of the recommendations in the Peter Coll report in relation to Member/Officer relationships. It was agreed that an externally facilitated leadership training session will take place with Party Group Leaders and the Council's Corporate Management Team at one of the regular Forum meetings. The date and details for the session will be circulated to Party Group Leaders.

Alleyway Transformation Fund and Unadopted Alleyways Programme

Councillor O'Hara raised an issue in relation to both the Alleyway Transformation programme funded by the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) and un-adopted alleyways. He advised that he had subsequently received an update on the Alleyway Transformation programme from the Neighbourhood Services Manager. It was agreed an update on un-adopted alleyways would be brought to a future meeting.

Draft Language Strategy

The Chief Executive advised that the Language Strategy Action Plan and proposed next steps will be considered by the Language Strategy Working Group this month. Following this meeting this will be brought to a future meeting of the Forum for consideration in advance of SP&R Committee.