

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 8th December 2022

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Matt Garrett (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)
Councillor Christine Bower (*for Councillor Michael Long*)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Alderman George Dorrian
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Councillor Carl Whyte (*for Councillor Donal Lyons*)
Alderman Sonia Copeland

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson, Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Councillor Michael Long, Councillor Donal Lyons

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)
John Tully Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 2)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 2)
Sinead Grimes Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 3)
Cathy Reynolds Director City Regeneration & Development (for Item 4)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Item 5)

1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance presented a summary of the current position for the 2023/24 revenue estimates, he outlined the uncontrollable costs and highlighted an increase in the projections for utility costs since the last update to Members. The Director outlined the subsequent impact on the District Rate and the specified reserves both for 2023/24 and future years for some of the options being considered. He advised that it was imperative that Members agree a Baseline Rate at the December SP and R Committee in order that work can progress to be able to set the District Rate by the legally required deadline of 15th February 2023. Members noted the significant challenges involved in setting the 2023/24 budget in these unprecedented times. Officers are continuing to challenge budget submissions and identify funding sources for the uncontrollable costs.

A query was raised by a Member in relation to recent legislation in the model for the setting of the District Rate and some Members stressed that this is considered going forward. It was also agreed that the Director follow up with the Department for Communities on current rate exemption policies and provide an update for Members at a future meeting.

The Director outlined the current proposals being considered in the other 10 Councils and a query was raised by a Member in relation to the status of rate support for some of the other Councils and what level this may be for 2023/24. The Director provided clarity as far as he could on this and it was agreed the Director of Finance will follow up and try to ascertain if there is any further update available.

The Director advised a detailed report on the current position and the proposals outlined would be presented to December's SP and R Committee.

2. Pay and Grading Review

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy updated the Forum on the progress being made on the Pay and Grading review proposals. He outlined for Members the detail of the proposals put forward including current position and advised that engagement with the Trade Union Group is ongoing. The projected costs and the subsequent impact on the district rate is still to be identified and an update on this will be included in the Revenue Estimates and District Rate report to December's SP and R Committee. A query was raised by a Member in relation to the current NJC framework for Local Government Services which the Director of Human Resources provided clarity on.

3. North Foreshore Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the North Foreshore site and outlined the background to the Expression of Interest for Giant's Park for the commercial, leisure development brief. She provided an overview of the development brief process, the outcome of the process and the final approval made by SP&R Committee. The Director of Physical Programmes advised that given the unforeseen circumstances in the market since the original approval was granted the developer had since submitted revised proposals for the site. She advised that these revised proposals had recently been considered by the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Steering Group. Detailed discussion followed and a number of queries were raised by Members in relation to accessibility to the site, sustainable transport and local community engagement which were

all noted by the Director of Physical Programmes to consider in the next stages. As recommended by the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Steering Group a report on the next steps in order to progress the stie options agreement will be brought to December's SP and R Committee for consideration.

The Director of Physical Programmes advised that a request had been made for a meanwhile use on part of the North Foreshore site, initially on a short term lease basis. It was agreed, in principle, that discussions on this meanwhile use could proceed with an update to be brought back to Members in due course.

4. Cathedral Quarter

The Director City of Regeneration and Development provided an update for Members on the Cathedral Buildings fire response which occurred on the 3rd October, causing the immediate displacement of 14 business and cultural organisations. The Director outlined the immediate response that took place managed by the Council, emergency responders, and statutory partners. Members also noted the subsequent support and advice that has been provided since and it was agreed a detailed briefing outlining the support and advice provided to date would be circulated to Party Group Leaders following the meeting.

5. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in the coming months.

Members also noted that the Replacement Planning Portal (new Planning IT system) had gone live as planned on 5th December and as previously advised was experiencing some initial issues. Officers continue to put in place internal contingences in order to mitigate any risks where possible.

6. AOB

Dates of Meeting 2023

Members noted the scheduled dates of the Forum meetings for 2023. The Chief Executive advised that, as previously agreed by Party Group Leaders, meetings will be held in person

commencing in January, 2023. A remote option will still be offered to those unable to attend in person, if required.