

# Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

## Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023

### Attendance

Members:

Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Ciaran Beattie  
Councillor Brian Smyth  
Alderman Sonia Copeland  
Councillor Christina Black  
Councillor Sarah Bunting  
Councillor Paul Doherty

**Apologies:** Councillor Séamas de Faoite,

### Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Sharon McNicholl Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)  
Kate Bentley, Director of Planning & Building Control (for Items 3 & 6)  
Mark McCann, Smart Belfast Programme Lead (for Item 4)  
Shauna Murtagh, Physical Programmes Portfolio Manager (for Item 5)  
John Greer, Director Economic Development (for Item 8)  
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 8)  
John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy (for Item 8)  
Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty (for Item 8)  
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### 1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2024/25. He outlined the work undertaken to date and Members noted the timeframe. Although it was agreed that Members receive monthly rate update reports to enable the striking of the district rate by February 2024 it was agreed there would be no update to the October meeting in order to allow work to progress and a detailed update will be brought in November.

The Director also provided an update on the review undertaken in relation to the criteria for the management of discretionary payment requests as requested by Members at September SP&R Committee. He outlined for Members the detail of the current requests received and it was agreed that a due diligence process begins imminently in advance of these requests

being considered by Members at SP&R Committee. The Director also outlined emerging proposals for subsequent requests and the proposed criteria to allocate funding from underspends to groups/organisations. A number of suggestions/recommendations were made by Members and it was also highlighted that timely communications to organisations/groups was crucial. The Director to consider the feedback provided and incorporate into a report to be brought to November SP&R for consideration.

## **2. Forth Meadow Community Greenway – Signage**

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members in relation to the erection of dual language signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway. He advised that the revised equality screening had now been undertaken following the recent decision at September SP&R Committee. There was detailed discussion on the screening outcome presented and an alternative proposal was made by a Member in relation to considering interpretive panels along the greenway linked to place names within the Springfield Park/Dam section of the greenway. Party Group Leaders to consider the proposal outlined and to be further discussed at the next meeting of Party Group Leaders. It was also noted that the counsel opinion in respect of this matter will be considered at November SP&R Committee.

## **3. Sunday Trading Hours**

The Director of Planning & Building Control provided further information as requested by Party Group Leaders in relation to requests received for extended trading hours this Christmas Eve, given it falls on a Sunday. Members noted the requests and the current legislative powers in relation to the extension to Sunday trading hours. The Director to follow up with those businesses that had made the request to reiterate that the legislative powers did not allow for this request to be considered.

## **4. Belfast Regional Innovation Hub Bid**

The Smart Belfast Programme Lead provided an update on the recent Council bid to the DSIT Advanced Wireless Innovation Region funding. Members noted the timeline in relation to decision making and that a report to include the detail discussed will go to November SP&R Committee.

## **5. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

The Physical Programmes Portfolio Manager provided a briefing for Members on the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund project and outlined the status of the applications currently at Stage 2 – Development. Whilst the majority of applications were progressing it was noted that 3 business cases were outstanding for various different reasons. It was noted that the state of readiness of the 3 outstanding business cases should not hold up the decision making for all other schemes. Members agreed that Officers continue to move to Stage 3 Delivery for all other schemes. The pre-arranged November Area Working Group meetings will therefore be used for this purpose.

## **6. Planning Update**

The Director of Planning & Building Control 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. There was a number of queries raised by Members for which the Director provided clarity. In relation to a specific query on short term lets it was agreed that the Director would circulate the current policy to Party Group Leaders. It was also further agreed that an invitation be extended to all Members to the special planning committee on enforcement that was being arranged.

## **7. Illuminate Requests**

The Chief Executive outlined for Members a number of illumination requests received namely:

- **World Menopause Day** - 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023
- **Child Brain Injury Trust GloWeek 20023** – 3<sup>rd</sup> November
- **Holocaust Memorial Day** – 27<sup>th</sup> January 2024
- **Gort na Móna – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024

Members noted the requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority. Councillor Long requested that a further illuminate request be considered for the MS Society with a date to be confirmed. There was consensus to add this request under the City Solicitors delegated authority. Councillor Long to forward date once confirmed.

## **8. AOB**

### **European Football Championships 2028**

The Director Economic Development provided an update for Members following the announcement by UEFA that the UK and Ireland had been successful in their bid to host the UEFA European Football Championships in 2028. He advised that the transitional period would begin from January 2024 in order to establish governance structures and arrangements for staffing, finance and allow project planning to commence. He stressed that final clarification on all is to follow, and updates will be brought to SP&R Committee in due course as this work progresses.

Members also noted the update in relation to future upcoming major events and thanked the Director and his team in the success of hosting the recent One Young World Global Summit.

### **Illuminate Request**

Councillor Bunting made a request for a City Hall Illumination for which no consensus was reached. A Member suggested an alternative option for the requested illumination. Party Group Leaders to further consider and to provide a response to the Chief Executive.

### **Request for Letter of Support**

The Chief Executive advised that a request had been made via Councillor De Faoite in relation to issuing a letter of support to Sólás Special Needs Charity with regards to Sólás acquiring Cregagh medical centre in a land transfer between the charity and the Department of Health. There was consensus from all that the Chief Executive proceed and issue a letter of support as outlined.

### **Holiday Pay Agreement**

The Director of Human Resources provided an update on the outcome of the Supreme Court case related to Holiday Pay. Members noted the council position specifically in relation to conciliation agreements signed for which the cost had already been accounted for and noted the challenges that may occur as a result of this case.

## **Hardship Scheme 2023/24**

The Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty presented the emerging proposals in relation to the development and implementation of a Hardship Scheme for 2023/24 which seeks to help alleviate the impact of the cost of living on vulnerable people across the city. He outlined the detail of the proposed cohorts and the proposed funding model. Members welcomed the proposals discussed and thanked the team for all the work that had gone in to redesigning the Hardship scheme for this year based on lessons learnt from the previous year. It was noted that time is of the essence and effective communications is essential around the scope of the scheme, what support may be available and how applicants can access this support. A report with the detail discussed will be submitted to October SP&R Committee.

## **Review of Summer Community Diversionary Festival Fund**

The Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive referred to the review of the Summer Community Diversionary Festival Fund that had recently been undertaken. She advised that it was anticipated that this would be brought to October SP&R Committee. However there were some issues raised by Members in relation to the outcomes of the review and it was agreed that further discussion by Party Group Leaders was needed. Further discussion to take place and the review to be brought to the November Forum meeting in advance of submission to November SP&R Committee.

## **St George's Market**

The Director Economic Development provided an update for Members in terms of some ongoing compliance issues with Traders at St George's Market. A number of queries and concerns were raised by Members for which the Director provided clarity and he stressed that engagement processes were fully implemented. Members noted the update.

A separate issue was raised by a Member in relation to ventilation in the Market and the increasing number of visitors specially at the Saturday/Sunday markets. The Director advised that options are being considered with the Physical Programme Team to ascertain how this could be best addressed given that the building was a listed building.

## **Shared Island Funding**

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy outlined the details of an upcoming workshop on Monday 16 October for the Shared Island Civic Society Fund. It was noted that the details had been circulated to Members. He also advised that a composite funding update report would be considered by Members at October SP&R Committee.