

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 7th December 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Sam Nelson (*for Cllr Michael Long*)
Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Brian Smyth
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Christina Black
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Alderman Dean McCullough (*for Councillor Sarah Bunting*)

Apologies: Councillor Michael Long, Councillor Sarah Bunting

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 2)
Catherine Christy, Human Resources Manager, Development (for Item 2)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 3, 4 & 5)
Eunan McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs
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. The Director outlined the challenges in setting the district rate for 2024/25 given the current economic climate and this will be discussed at the upcoming Party Group Briefings. It was noted that given that the party group briefings were due to take place the following week the timeframe would not allow for Member feedback to be included in the report to December SP&R Committee. Therefore, the special SP&R Committee being held for 12 January 2024 will be required in order to consider the overall position with a view to recommending the rate for 2024/25. Special meetings for the other standing committees will then be required the week commencing 15 January 2024 to agree the cash limits for Committees in order for the level of the District Rate to be set for 2024/25 by the 15 February 2024.

2. Elected Member Development Programme

Members previously agreed that the proposed programme of work for the Elected Member Development framework and the re-accreditation of Charter Plus would be considered at this Forum. The Human Resources Manager outlined the current framework and there was detailed discussion with a number of recommendations made by Members in relation to the processes already in place for learning and development. Specific recommendations were made in relation to budget allocation for learning and development and the potential to extend this over a council term as opposed to an annual allocation and the need for flexibility. Officers to further consider the recommendations discussed and an update will be brought back in January. It was agreed that the Member Development Strategic Framework would be circulated to Party Group Leaders following the meeting for discussion with their individual parties. Plans for identifying a strategic case study were also outlined and it was noted that this will be discussed further at the next meeting.

The Human Resources Manager also advised that an offer had been received to observe another Council Charter Plus assessment panel and it was agreed that the Chair of SP&R would be the most appropriate Member to participate in this assessment along with the relevant Officer. Members also noted upcoming political management development training for Council Officers which includes the proposal for Members participation in some of the training sessions. The Human Resources Manager to follow up with Party Group Leaders to seek nominations.

3. Hugh Hanna Statue

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members in relation to the relocation of the Hugh Hanna Statue which was previously considered by Party Group Leaders. Members noted that a subsequent request on a revised location had since been received. There were a number of issues and concerns raised in relation to the revised location outlined and it was agreed that further consideration by parties was required. Members to further consider and an update will be brought back to the Forum in January. A Member asked for supplementary information to also be provided in advance for the next meeting.

4. 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. In relation to queries raised by Members the City Solicitor to follow up with those Members.

5. AOB

Coronation Gift

The Chief Executive referred to the offer of a coronation gift (*an Irish Oak Tree*) to His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Belfast which was previously discussed. Members discussed potential location options for the planting of the tree including the grounds of City Hall and it was agreed that this would be further explored and an update will be brought back for Members consideration.

Service Improvement Working Group

The Chief Executive outlined the rationale for the establishment of a Service Improvement Working Group and the Director of Finance highlighted the linkages to the work being undertaken in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan. He also advised that it would be beneficial for the work being undertaken on emerging efficiency proposals to help offset any future current district rate increase. The Chief Executive to consider the terms of reference for the group and an update will be brought back for Members consideration.

Belfast 2024

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Belfast 2024 programme following the decision by Members at November SP&R Committee to hold a special SP&R meeting to consider issues raised. He advised that a date for the Special week commencing 11 January would be arranged imminently. Members will also consider an update on The Mac at the same meeting.

Northern Ireland Policing Board

The Chief Executive advised that he had received correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to independent members to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. It was noted that a report would be brought to November SP&R Committee and the correspondence would be circulated to Party group Leaders in advance. In relation to a query raised by a Member regarding the request for the Secretary of State to meet with Members on a number of issues it was noted that this would be followed up with Democratic Services.

Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illuminate requests received. There were some queries raised on one specific request specifically in relation to criteria which will require further consideration. The City Solicitor to consider the queries raised by Members and then to be brought back to a future meeting.

Members then noted the following requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **World Fairtrade Day – 10 May 2024**
- **Philippines Independence Day – 12 June 2024**