

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 11 January 2024

Members:

Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Brian Smyth
Councillor Christina Black
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Sarah Bunting

Apologies:

Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development (for Item 1)
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 2)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Items 3 & 7)
Catherine Christy, Human Resources Manager, Development (for Item 3)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 4,5 & 6)
John Tully, Director of City and Organisational strategy (for Item 7)
Lynsey Cameron, Acting Chief Executive's Executive Manager (secretariat)

Attendees:

Nick Walkley, Avison Young (for Item 1)

1. City Regeneration

Party Leaders welcomed a presentation from Nick Walkley on city regeneration issues. The need to prioritise the city centre for the benefit of the wider city and region was noted. Issues such as city centre living, connectivity and regeneration were discussed. Details on next steps and the proposed regeneration framework will be brought back to Party Leaders.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2024/25. Party Leaders noted the Director is available for briefings next week should they be required, and parties are asked to contact the Director directly to arrange. The Director confirmed the special SP&R committee meeting to agree the rate has been scheduled on 26 January at 9.30am.

The Director of Finance also provided an overview of the response to the DoF consultation on non-domestic and domestic rating measures to support budget sustainability by raising additional revenue. Discussion took place on measures such as the rate level on vacant land/buildings and the introduction of a tourism tax. The draft response will be brought to January SP&R committee for approval.

3. Elected Member Development Programme

The Human Resources Manager updated elected members following December's meeting advising that the recommendations from the previous discussion have now been implemented and that updated documents would be circulated to Party Leaders next week. The Director of HR asked that members advise officers on the best approach to engaging with their party members on this. With regards the strategic project for Charter Plus, an update will be brought to members in due course.

4. Hugh Hanna Statue

The City Solicitor reminded Party Leaders on the request received to relocate the Hugh Hanna Statue. Party Leaders advised that previous concerns raised still apply. It was agreed that options should be brought to a future meeting on potential alternative nearby sites.

5. Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illuminate requests received. Further discussion also took place on a request previously received and it was agreed this would be brought to SP&R committee.

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

- **Donor's Day** – 26 January 2024
- **Care Day 2024** – 16 February 2024
- **Holy Month of Ramadan** – 1 March 2024
- **National Day of Reflection** – 23 March 2024

6. 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.

7. Pay and Grading Review

J Tully updated Party Leaders on the programme and current discussions with the Trade Unions. The structure design, assessment and assimilation process were outlined. Party Leaders noted that the proposed structure will be brought to January SP&R committee. It was noted that the associated costings have been included in the rate proposal.

8. AOB

Coronation Gift – Location of Tree

The City Solicitor referred to the offer of a coronation gift (an Irish Oak Tree) to His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Belfast which was previously discussed. Party Leaders were advised of the potential location in City Hall grounds and the change in tree to a lime tree. The proposal to be brought to January SP&R committee.

Discussion also took place on implementing a traffic 'no idling zone' to the west side of City Hall. The City Solicitor to consider the options around this.

Declaration of Interest Training

The City Solicitor reminded Party Leaders that 2 January dates had been circulated for members training. Following discussion, it was agreed that these dates be cancelled and that revised dates be brought back to Party Leaders for consideration. It was also agreed the training should be a hybrid format.

National Famine Commemoration 2024

The response from Minister Martin was noted by Party Leaders. The City Solicitor advised an update will be brought to the next SP&R committee.

Belfast 2024

Discussion took place on the Belfast 2024 programme with Party Leaders noting the request for a decision on the way forward to be made at the January meeting of SP&R committee.

Tribeca

The Chief Executive advised a report on vesting will be brought to January SP&R committee.

Director of Resources and Fleet

The Chief Executive advised that regrettably a letter of resignation had been received from the Director who will leave her post, due to personal reasons, in April. The Director of HR advised a recruitment process, subject to member approval, will commence in February.

Members portal

Party Leaders requested the senior management contact details and organisational chart on the members portal is updated, with copies also emailed to members. The City Solicitor to action.

Special Party Leaders

Following a member request, it was agreed a special Party Leaders meeting will be convened in February to discuss activities and programming around Christmas, Halloween and also the Night-time Economy.