

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 11th April 2024

Attendance

Members:

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

Apologies: Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
John Greer, Director of Development (for Item 1)
Michael Denny, Commercial Manager (for Item 1)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 2,3 & 4)
John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 4)
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. **Belfast Bikes Future Operating Model and Investment**

The Director of Development provided a briefing on the expansion to the Belfast Bikes scheme previously considered by SP&R and CG&R Committees. He presented to Members an outline of the current scheme, the detail of the current contractual arrangements, the learning gathered from elsewhere including the use of hybrid bikes and the proposed next steps in relation to the procurement process for the scheme. A number of queries and issues were raised by Members in relation to the future challenges and risks involved with any new operating model for which the Director and the Commercial Manager provided clarity. The need for strategic engagement with the Department for Infrastructure was highlighted in relation to ongoing development of safe cycle routes and the correlation of any proposed new bike docking stations. It was also recommended by Members that any decisions going forward should be considered by SP&R Committee in order to consider on a city wide basis rather than via the Area Working Groups to allow for a more strategic approach.

The Director also highlighted potential additional capital and revenue costs which may be incurred as part of any new operator model. It was agreed that the Director and Commercial

manager would further consider the points and issues raised in relation to the procurement process and a report will be brought back to the Forum before consideration at SP&R Committee. It was agreed that the presentation would be circulated in confidence to Party Group Leaders following the meeting.

2. Draft Irish Language Policy

The City Solicitor provided an update on the development of the draft corporate Irish Language Policy for the Council. She discussed the changes to the Policy which were proposed at SP&R Committee in February. She advised that the intention was for the Policy to be brought to SP&R Committee in April for approval to be subject to public consultation, staff consultation. The Equality Impact Assessment would be subject to consultation alongside the draft Policy. Members also noted there may be potential resource implications aligned to some of the proposals within the policy, which again will be explored alongside the consultation process in order to inform any future decision making. Some Members sought clarity on specific proposals within the draft policy and the City Solicitor confirmed that these would be picked up in the draft Policy and accompanying Report.

3. 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 a specific query raised by a Member on the Tribeca site, it was noted that a report on City Development & Regeneration would be brought to April SP&R Committee which will include an update on the Tribeca site. The Chief Executive subsequently provided an update in relation to the ongoing issues within the site and the work with LPS in relation to valuation of the site.

The Chief Executive provided an update on Giants Park, and it was noted a report will go to a future meeting of the SP&R Committee. The City Solicitor also provided an update on discussions ongoing with the Department for Infrastructure in relation to enforcement complaints about Casement Park.

4. AOB

Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received. Members noted the following request would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

Show Racism the Red Card campaign - Black History Month - 1st October 2024.

Members also noted an update on the upcoming Illumination for the president of Ireland, Michael Higgins birthday which had previously been agreed by SP&R Committee. The consensus was that the illumination colours would be blue and green.

Pay and Grading Review

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised that discussions are continuing with Trade Unions on an agreement for the pay and grading model following the recent ballot and briefing sessions which took place. He outlined for Members the detail of the discussions to date and the key next steps. It was noted that Members will be kept updated as this work progresses.

Issues Raised by Members

Potholes – City Solicitor to follow up on whether correspondence was issued as previously agreed on behalf of the SP&R Committee to the Department for Infrastructure in relation to the maintenance of potholes.

Assembly Rooms – City Solicitor to follow up with Democratic services on a date for a special SP&R on this issue.

Weeding in Alleyways – Chief Executive to consider the recommendation to contact the Department for Infrastructure to explore the potential for an SLA in order to allow the Council to undertake the DfI weed spraying programme in order to speed up the process. Weeding for grass verges to also be considered if possible.

Council Led Events/Launches – The Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services to review the current process in place for issuing invitations to Members

for Council led events/launches and also to consider the potential need for a communications protocol specifically for Members.