

# Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

## Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024

### Attendance

#### Members:

Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Ciaran Beattie  
Councillor Christina Black  
Councillor Anthony Flynn (*for 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  
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 6 & 7)  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance  
John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 3)  
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy  
Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty (for Item 1)  
Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy (for Item 1)  
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### 1. Presentation – Bill Strickland Belfast Centre for Arts and Technology

The Chief Executive welcomed Mr Bill Strickland and his colleagues from the Strickland Global Leadership Institute. Mr Strickland presented a briefing on the origin of his work in relation to the creation of vocational training and cultural enrichment centres around the world, creating environments in which people would flourish, specifically young people from areas of deprivation. Mr Strickland outlined the detail of his vision for Belfast. His team also outlined the extensive stakeholder engagement that has taken place to date. Detailed discussion followed and Members noted their interest in engaging further as this proposal moves forward. A number of key points and comments were raised by Members in relation to connectivity, creating bridges with existing providers and outreach to those hard to reach communities. Mr Strickland and his team advised that they would consider the points raised moving forward and highlighted key milestones for the project. The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty to circulate contact details to Party Group Leaders.

The Chief Executive advised that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy was preparing a Corporate Social responsibility prospectus which will be brought to a future meeting of the Forum.

## **2. Smart Belfast Innovation Programme**

The Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the development on a number of Immersive technology initiatives currently being designed and delivered by City Innovation. She outlined the progress to date on the City Hall exhibition immersive experience project within three rooms on the east side of City Hall including providing an update on the concept and themes for these rooms. A report will go to May SP&R Committee, and a presentation would be made to the Installations – City Hall/City Hall Grounds Working Group. It was agreed that the concept presentation slides would be shared with Party Group Leaders.

The Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services also provided an update on the Augment the City challenge competition for SMEs and innovators. In relation to a query raised from a Member on the applications process the Deputy Chief Executive provided clarity.

## **3. Draft Electric Vehicle Strategy**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy provided an update on the current status of the draft Electric Vehicle Strategy and outlined feedback received from the Department for Infrastructure. He provided a summary on the proposed approach in relation to electric vehicle charging points across the Council estate and provided clarity on a number of queries raised by Members. In relation to a point raised by a Member the Director to consider non profit making organisations as potential location sites. A further query was raised by a Member in relation to enforcement for improper use of car park spaces specifically allocated for electric vehicles. The City Solicitor subsequently provided an update on the work ongoing from a legal perspective with the other Councils. The City Solicitor to also ensure that the electric vehicle space in City Hall courtyard is marked accordingly. The Director of City and Organisational Strategy to consider the feedback provided and the draft strategy to be brought to June SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

#### **4. Knockagh Monument**

The Chief Executive provided an update on previous requests made for Belfast City Council to reconsider its position and formally join the Knockagh Monument Joint Committee. Correspondence had also been previously sent to advise that following discussion with Party Leaders, Belfast City Council would not be reconsidering membership of the Joint Committee. He advised a further request has since been received from Mid and East Antrim, on behalf of the Knockagh Monument Joint Committee. There was a consensus that Belfast City Council would not be reconsidering membership and the Chief Executive to respond again on that basis.

#### **5. Arc21 Joint Committee**

The Chief Executive referred to correspondence received from the Acting Chief Executive of arc21 in relation to attendance of elected representatives at the arc21 Committee. Since the flexibility to hold remote meetings was not extended the recent in person meetings have not been quorate. Party Group Leaders to raise within their own parties in relation to attendance at future meetings so that the committee can take place.

#### **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.

#### **7. AOB**

##### **Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Meetings**

The Chief Executive provided an update on scheduling for All Party meetings with the new NI Executive Ministers. An email will be issued from the Office of the Chief Executive with the details discussed.

##### **Day of Reflection 2024**

The Chief Executive referred to the joint statement on behalf of Party Group Leaders for the Day of Reflection in June 2024. A copy of which was previously circulated to Party Group

Leaders for their consideration. There was consensus to issue the statement and a copy of the final statement to be issued to be circulated to Party Group Leaders.

### **City Hall Income Generation Proposals**

The City Solicitor referred to the 2024/25 rate setting process, whereby proposals were put forward and agreed by Members for the introduction of new charges and the revision of existing charges for activities at City Hall. She outlined the phased approach and the detail of the proposals being considered. A report will be brought to May SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

As part of the discussion a Member also raised the ongoing issues in relation to Donegall Square West including amplification issues. City Solicitor to follow up.

### **Building Cultural Networks**

The Chief Executive advised a request had been received from a Member in relation to Officer representation at a Building Cultural Networks workshop on 29 May 2024. Following discussion and given there was no consensus a report will be brought to May SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

### **Draft Irish Language Policy Consultation/Equality Impact**

The City Solicitor outlined the timeframe for the consultation process for the draft Irish Language Policy which will include engagement with Trade Union colleagues in accordance with the Council's Industrial Relations Framework as well as engagement with the Irish Stakeholders Forum. It was noted that a report outlining the proposed timeframe would be considered by the Language Strategy Working Group later today and then subsequently at May SP&R Committee.

### **Draft Language Action Plan**

The City Solicitor provided an update on the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan. She advised that Members had suggested some further amendments at April SP&R committee to the Action Plan. Specifically in relation to the development of a Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme and recurring annual funding for a large-scale event to mark Seachtain na Gaeilge. Given the proposals are likely to require additional resource commitments it was proposed that

there is a commitment to undertaking exploratory work on these proposals as part of the Action Plan. This will be considered by the Language Strategy Working Group later today and then subsequently at May SP&R Committee.

### **Illuminate Requests**

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

**Cliftonville FC Winning the Irish Cup – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024**

**Refugee Week – 17<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

Members also noted a report would go to SP&R Committee in relation to the request for Baby Loss awareness week.

### **Chief Executive Appraisal**

Members were reminded to forward nominations for the Chief Executive appraisal panel. The correspondence in relation to this will be reissued to Party Group Leaders.

### **City Hall Grounds**

The Chief Executive briefed Members on an incident that had taken place in City Hall grounds, Members will be kept updated following an investigation. A Member also referred to a separate incident in City Hall grounds and the City Solicitor to follow up.

### **Summer Community Divisionary Festival Fund**

An issue was raised by a Member in relation to the Summer Community Divisionary Festival Fund that had recently opened and it was agreed this would be followed up with the Strategic Director, City & Neighbourhood Services.