

# **Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum**

## **Thursday 15 August 2024**

### **Attendance**

#### Members:

Councillor Jenna Maghie  
Councillor Ryan Murphy  
Councillor Áine Groogan  
Councillor Sarah Bunting  
Councillor Séamas de Faoite  
Councillor Ciaran Beattie

**Apologies:** Alderman Sonia Copeland

#### **Officers:**

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Sharon McNicholl Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance  
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy  
David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services  
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property and Projects  
Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Civic Services  
Lisa Toland, Senior Manager – Economy  
Lynsey Cameron, Executive Manager (Acting) (secretariat)

### **1. Finance Update**

The Director of Finance presented the Quarter 1 Financial Report for 2024/25 and outlined the income, expenditure and projected underspend for the period. The recent HMRC settlement with regards a VAT issue was discussed. The upcoming rate setting process was also discussed with service pressures and inflation highlighted. A Quarter 1 report will be brought to August SP&R committee. The Director also provided an update on the Discretionary Fund, and outlined the applications received. A report with the detail discussed will be brought to SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

### **2. Belfast Stories**

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy advised a report would be brought to August SP&R committee providing an update for committee members on the projects next steps, including key milestones. The report will also include details of a proposed members visit as well as details on an upcoming public consultation seeking views on the visitor experience, public space and creative hub within the development. Members noted that work will be starting on

the development of a business case which will be presented to members towards the end of the year.

### **3. Update on Ministerial Engagements**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy updated members on engagement with the Executive Ministers, noting that a meeting with the Finance Minister took place on 5 August and meetings with the Economy and Infrastructure Ministers are planned for 12 September and 2 October respectively. Discussion took place on the actions arising following the recent meeting with the Finance Minister.

### **4. ICS NI – Request for local Government representatives to be members of Area Integrated Partnership Boards**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised members that correspondence had been received from the Department of Health in relation to the development and implementation of the Integrated Care System for Northern Ireland (ICS NI). It has been agreed that council representation on AIPBs will be undertaken by local councillors. Members noted that the Department is seeking a single councillor nomination for a 4 year term. Discussion followed. The Director advised a report seeking a Belfast nomination would be brought to August SP&R committee.

### **5. 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.

### **6. AOB**

#### **Irish Language Policy – Consultation & Engagement Plan**

The City Solicitor confirmed that the consultation would be live next week. Members noted the bi-lingual approach to engagement, including staff and public events, including the consultation response itself. As a large number of responses are anticipated, it is expected an update will be brought to members in the Spring.

## **Illuminate Requests**

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illuminate requests received which would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **Childhood Cancer Awareness Month** – 2 Sept 2024
- **Palliative Care Week 2024** – 9 Sept 2024
- **Nexus NI 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** – 4 Nov 2024

## **Successful Bid - PEACEPLUS Programme**

The Director of Property and Projects advised that the Council has been successful in securing funding of almost £15 million through the PEACEPLUS Programme, through SEUPB.

Projects that are due to benefit from the funding include an LGBTQIA+ hub, Sanctuary Theatre, Distillery Street Redevelopment Project, Annadale Open Space, and Access to the Hills.

Members asked for their thanks to be passed on to officers for their hard work in this regard.

## **Electric Vehicle Strategy**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised that a report will be brought to August SP&R committee seeking member approval for the first stage of the strategy which will include a commercial assessment of the Councils land assets, engaging with the market and developing a sustainable and affordable model, a recommendation for which, will be brought back to members.

## **Innovation**

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the Innovation programme of work and inclusive innovation at a local level, which will be wrapped around existing programmes.

Members were reminded of the recent recruitment exercise for an Innovation Commissioner. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a candidate has been offered the position and are in the process of agreeing terms. More details will follow in due course.

### **Northern Ireland Water Correspondence – Budgetary Constraints**

Discussion took place on recent correspondence received from NI Water on budgetary constraints and the implications this will have on Belfast's growth ambition. The Chief Executive advised the Council will be writing to NI Water outlining this concern. A report on the matter will also be brought to members in due course.

### **Update on recent protests – operational response**

The Senior Manager - Economy provided an update on the engagement with affected businesses to date and the initial proposed areas of advice and support. A report will be brought to the Special SP&R committee scheduled for 16 August for member consideration.

Members noted that Botanic Gardens will be closed on Saturday 17 August to facilitate preparations for the Belfast Mela.

### **In-house Agency Research Report – Findings**

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined the report, including its recommendation, which would be brought to August SP&R committee.