

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 12th September 2024

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Ryan Murphy
Councillor Áine Groogan
Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 2)
Jim Girvan, Neighbourhood Services Manager (for Item 3)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 4)
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy (for Items 5 & 7)
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects (for Items 5 & 7)
John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 7)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Presentation - Shane Quinn. Belfast Building Trust

The Chief Executive welcomed Mr Shane Quinn from the Belfast Building Trust. Mr Quinn presented a briefing on the ethos of the work of the Trust along with a synopsis of the heritage and cultural schemes the Trust has led on in Belfast over the years. He also highlighted examples of reusing assets that make Belfast Special. There was detailed discussion in relation to the many challenges and opportunities involved in the regeneration of historic buildings in the City and the need for more collaboration amongst key stakeholders in taking schemes forward. Members also discussed the need for a more strategic approach in reusing existing physical and cultural assets in ways that are relevant for people with meaningful social and economic outcomes for all. The Strategic Director of Place & Economy to arrange to follow up on the points raised with Mr Quinn and an update will be brought back to the Forum in due course.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance outlined for Members details of the council's Statement of Accounts, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31 March 2024. The

Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position. A report will go to September SP&R for Members approval, following the rescheduled Audit & Risk Panel in advance of the accounts being published by the 30 September deadline. In relation to a query raised by a Member the Director provided clarity and advised that Departmental spend/budgets would be included for discussion at the upcoming Members Workshop in September. It was also agreed an update on Departmental spend would be brought to a future Party Group Leaders meeting.

The Director also provided a summary of the Medium Term Financial Plan which will be considered by September SP&R Committee. Given previous discussions with Members on the challenges involved for the setting of the 25/26 district rate it is imperative to consider future priorities so that any budgetary gaps can be identified in a timely manner.

3. Community Support Plan 2025/29

The Neighbourhood Services Manager briefed Members on the ongoing work in relation to the development of the Community Support Plan 2025/29 along with an update on the review of the current community development large grants scheme. It was noted that a briefing report had also been circulated in advance of the meeting. Following discussion it was agreed that the Neighbourhood Services Manager would arrange Party Group Briefings in order to provide a more detailed update for Party Groups on the outcomes of the engagement that has taken place to date and to seek the views of Members. It was noted that flexibility is considered in relation to the timing of these briefings.

A number of issues were also raised by Members in relation to the need to review Council owned Community Centres in terms of infrastructure, current locations, community needs and operational models. This was noted by the Neighbourhood Services Manager and is to be further considered. This issue will also be added to the agenda for the Party Group briefings being scheduled and an update to be brought back to a future meeting.

4. The 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill – Consultation

The Director of Human Resources referred to the the consultation issued in July 2024 by the Department for the Economy. She outlined the background, key objectives and the views sought in relation to the consultation. In formulating the draft response, it was noted that the

view of each Council Department had been captured. A draft Council response which will incorporate a response from both an Employers perspective and a Civic Leader perspective will be brought to September SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

5. Shared Prosperity Fund

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy presented an update on the background to the Shared Prosperity Fund for Northern Ireland. He also outlined the investment priorities/themes within the fund and the mix of funding available between the investment priorities over the life of the Fund up to March 2025. Members discussed the proposed approach given the challenging timeframe and noted the proposed priority projects identified. The presentation shared will be circulated to Party Group Leaders to further consider in advance of September SP&R Committee.

6. Planning Update

The Chief Executive 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

Illuminate Request

The Chief Executive outlined for Members an illuminate request for an event in City Hall grounds week commencing 16 September 2024. Members noted the request would be agreed under the City Solicitor's delegated authority.

Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre

The Chief Executive provided an update on the outcome of the consultation on the draft Equality Impact Assessment carried out in relation to the erection of bilingual Irish/English signage at Olympia Leisure Centre. Members noted the summary findings and that a detailed report will be brought to September SP&R Committee.

“Our Sporting Summer”

The Chief Executive outlined the programme for an event to be hosted by the Lord Mayor in September to celebrate and mark the recent Olympics and Paralympics Games. Members noted the date of the event and that the finalised details/timings will follow from the Lord Mayor’s Office.

Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Meetings

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy provided an update on All Party meetings with the new NI Executive Ministers that have been arranged for October. He outlined the proposed agendas for the individual meetings, and it was agreed the agendas discussed will be circulated to Party Group Leaders following the meeting. Full briefings for each of the meetings will be provided to Members in advance.

Hardships Programme 2024/25

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy outlined the current budget position in regard to the 2024/25 Hardship Programme and the options recommended by the Cost of Living Working Group in terms of allocation. He advised a report will be brought to September SP&R seeking Members views.

Potential Extension to Contract

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy outlined a potential extension to a current contract. There were a number of questions raised by Members in relation to this extension and it was agreed that further detail is brought back to the Forum before consideration at SP&R Committee.

Targeted Acquisitions

The Chief Executive provided a briefing on potential acquisitions being considered and advised that a report will be brought to September SP&R in relation to the most advanced proposal.

A Member highlighted another potential acquisition in the City Centre. It was noted that this would require further exploration, the Strategic Director of Place & Economy to follow up with the Director of City Regeneration and Development. It was also agreed that a

Member/Officer Workshop is considered in order to explore options for the potential operational use of a proposed acquisition.

Wastewater Treatment Works

Members noted the upcoming site visit to the Wastewater Treatment Works which has been arranged for Members on 17 September 2024, the details of which was previously circulated to Members.