

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 27th November, 2024

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick;
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Black, de Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe,
McDowell, McKay, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin,
O'Neill and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Mr. F. Grant, Assets Development Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following three items i was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

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Presentation - The MAC

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. L. McGinley, Interim Director of the MAC to the meeting.

Ms. McGinley provided an overview of the work being undertaken by the MAC and its transformation programme of the last eight months under the themes of resilience, sustainability and accessibility.

She described the work which had been undertaken included the restructure of leadership and provided an overview of a recent visitor survey. She highlighted the MAC's alignment to Belfast's key strategies and the Belfast Agenda.

She informed the Committee of the various exhibitions and events which had taken place and how the space was used.

She outlined the MAC's commitment to growth and regeneration and its plans for the future and intended key outcomes.

She informed Members that she looked forward to the continuation of the collaboration with the Council and pointed out that continued lobbying for arts funding was required.

During discussion, Ms. McGinley answered a range of questions in relation to socio-economic accessibility of the MAC, its corporate hire and outreach to local communities.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update provided by the MAC on its transformation journey.

Presentation - Translink (Grand Central Station Update)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. McAllister, Head of Belfast Grand Central Station Programme, and Mr. D. Bannon, Central Area Manager, representing Translink, to the meeting.

Mr. Bannon provided an update of the City Centre traffic congestion and mitigation plans including bus and rail night-time services over the festive season which would start on 30th November. He also explained the passenger journey analysis which had been undertaken, together with promotional activities.

In relation to the Belfast Grand Central Station/Weavers Cross Transport Led Regeneration Project, following questions from the Committee during its last presentation, Mr. McAllister presented a comprehensive overview of the social value delivery figures of the project. He explained the number of apprentices and training placements, Community Social Value Projects, engagement with local schools and arts and heritage activity which had been undertaken.

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During discussion, the representatives answered a wide range of questions regarding night-time services, congestion on the Grosvenor Road and the employment and placement application process.

In response to a Member's question in relation to traffic flow on Sandy Row and the impact on local traders, Mr. McAllister advised that Translink had engaged with the Linen Quarter BID representatives to progress the issue. He also highlighted that the Variable Message Signage used to communicate travel information should not be blank and he would investigate the issue.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, Translink would provide further information on the issues raised.

Zoo Update

The Committee noted the update on the issues raised by the Committee at its meeting on 6th November.

Department for Infrastructure (Roads) - Annual Report

The Chairperson introduced Mr. D. McFarlane, Divisional Roads Manager, Mr. G. Salmon, Network Traffic Manager, Mr. J. Torney and Mr. D. Williams, Section Engineers, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting to present their Annual Report.

Mr. McFarlane provided an overview of works completed across the Council area during the year 2023/24 and outlined the initial proposals for schemes to be undertaken in the year 2024/25.

He highlighted that the opening Capital budget for structural maintenance of the road network in 2024/25 was £89m, which would enable the delivery of the highest priority resurfacing, roadside stability and drainage projects and those projects to be delivered within the Belfast Council area were outlined in the report.

He reminded the Committee that, for many years, the Department had operated within a constrained Resource budget and had continued to prioritise key essential services. This meant that the Department would continue with a Limited Service policy for routine maintenance activities such as defect repair, grass cutting and gully emptying. The Limited Service policy allowed the Department to repair defects greater than 50mm on all roads including low trafficked rural roads and on high trafficked roads, defects greater than 20mm would also be repaired, subject to available resources. The Department would aim to cut all roadside verges and sightline grass at least twice between April and October on the more heavily trafficked roads and once a year on other roads, when it was safe to do so. He explained that this aimed to balance the need for road safety while protecting the environment and encouraging biodiversity. However, sightlines at bends and junctions would be cut as frequently as required to ensure public safety.

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Mr. McFarlane pointed out that the Division continued to face significant staffing pressures which was impacting on their ability to deliver. In an effort to maximise effectiveness, he encouraged Councillors to report road defects using the DfI online reporting facility provided by NIDirect.

He stated that the Department recognised that investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure could help make the streets feel safer and more accessible for the many people who wanted greater choice in how they travelled, particularly for shorter everyday journeys. It could also help to reduce air pollution and tackle climate change, particularly in combination with public transport. He advised that DfI were developing a Northern Ireland wide Active Travel Delivery Plan that included an update of its policies and design guidance for Active Travel as well as network plans for our larger towns and cities. He pointed out that public consultation on the plan was scheduled for later in 2024. When complete, the Active Travel Delivery Plan would complement the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan and the Strategic Plan for Greenways to provide a firm basis for the prioritisation, design, and delivery of active travel across the north.

He advised that the Department continued to work closely with Councils to better understand their five-year active travel programme and to develop an effective grant and support framework for the effective delivery of greenways and other measures to promote and encourage active travel.

In relation to Major Projects in the Council area, he informed the Committee that the publication of the prioritised list of major road schemes explained that development work on York Street Interchange was currently paused. A decision on the schemes within this list would be considered following confirmation of the Department's Transport Plans and the availability of funding.

He provided the Committee with updates on the main strategic transportation schemes for the city, together with an overview of the DfI Roads Programme of Works for 2023/24 for those projects and schemes that had been completed and were in progress, which included updates on minor works, maintenance of structures and inspections.

He also provided a summary of the Belfast Cycling Network, network traffic and street lighting, collision remedial schemes, traffic schemes and pedestrian measures and resident's parking schemes.

During discussion, Members raised concerns regarding the lack of progress in commencing the pedestrian crossing on Knockbreda Road, which would facilitate the opening of the rear gate to Cherryvale by Belfast City Council and highlighted the support which had been received for the crossing in the last consultation. Mr. Salmon advised that a request for the Council to carry out a DfI joint consultation with residents on the latest proposal was still required and they would request that the Council reconsider its position. He stated that he was prepared to assist and carry out a letter drop to residents in the near future.

In response to a Member's question in relation to plans for further traffic calming or active travel measures on either Ravenhill Park or Onslow Parade. Mr. Salmon advised that a scheme for this location was currently being designed and explained the process

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to progress the scheme was subject to resources and the completion of the necessary legislative process.

In relation to a Member's request to reassess road safety and traffic calming in the Grosvenor Road/Distillery Street Area due to the new Transport Hub and number of parked cars. Mr Salmon advised that it was likely that another assessment of the area would have the same priority outcome.

In response to a Member's question to accelerate residents car parking schemes in the Iveagh Street/Distillery Street areas, Mr. McFarlane advised that a review of the Residents Parking Scheme was complete and work was being undertaken to develop processes to ensure the balance of all stakeholder needs.

Regarding the gritting of roads in the South Belfast and the Rosetta area. Mr. Williams advised that a robust criterion was in place but saltboxes could be considered for any specific streets of concern.

The Members drew the attention of the officers from DfI Roads to a number of additional matters, which Mr. McFarlane advised would be investigated and a further update submitted to the Committee in due course:

- Ravenhill Cycle Lane Consultation update;
- Due to the Boyne Bridge closure, the traffic lights at the junction of Sandy Row and Hope Street causing congestion and access issues for residents in the Linfield Road area;
- Discuss with Translink the Sandy Row Variable Message Signage which should not be blank and note that Sandy Row is open for Business;
- Removal of orange bollards on Donegall Road and an update on the cycle lanes and removal of orange bollards is required; and
- Easter Transport Plan timescales update.

In relation to a Member's question in relation to plans to increase cycling safety on Clifton Street. Mr. McFarlane advised that all accidents were investigated by the PSNI, along with DfI. He highlighted that cyclist provision was linked to the Easter Transport Plan and would be redefined in due course.

Mr. McFarlane advised that, where relevant, action would be taken on these issues if it was deemed necessary after inspection. He highlighted that in relation to the city centre congestion, a Strategic Group had been set up to look at mitigations to try to assist and monitor the issue.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

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The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, DfI Roads would provide further information on the issues raised.

Standing Order 14 - Submission of Minutes

In accordance with Standing Order 14, the Committee agreed, as the meeting had been held later than seven clear days before the meeting of the Council, that the minutes of the meeting be submitted to the Council on 2nd December for ratification.

Chairperson