

# Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

## Thursday 16 January 2025

### **Attendance**

Members:

Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Séamas de Faoite  
Councillor Ryan Murphy  
Councillor Sarah Bunting  
Councillor Aine Groogan

**Apologies:** Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Alderman Sonia Copeland

### **Officers:**

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services  
Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance  
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services  
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy  
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development (item 3)  
Eunan McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing & External Affairs (item 6)  
Lynsey Cameron, Executive Manager (Acting) (secretariat)

### **Other:**

Grainia Long, Chief Executive  
Liam Gunn, Regional Manager  
Elma Newberry, Director of the Strategic Housing Authority for Northern Ireland  
Fiona McGrath, Head of Place Shaping Belfast

### **1. Presentation from NIHE**

NIHE representatives were in attendance to present on their Belfast Housing Investment Plan.

### **2. Finance Update**

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2025/26. Various scenarios on the impact on the rate were highlighted to Party Leaders and non-recurrent spend requests were also outlined. Discussion also took place on income modelling for the Crematorium. Party Leaders noted this would be brought to January SP&R committee.

The Director of Finance also outlined two live consultations, NILGOSC McCloud Remedy and Stormont Draft Budget. It was agreed a draft response to both consultations would be brought to committee for member consideration.

### **3. Citywide Strategic Site Assessments**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reminded Members of the status of Council sites which had come forward through the SSA process as well additional opportunities presented to Council through working with housing delivery partners, DfC as the Housing Regulator and NIHE as the statutory housing provider. The Director outlined the 11 sites proposed to be presented to SP&R committee in February. Following discussion members agreed that 10 of the 11 sites should be brought to committee to agree progressing to explore delivery routes for housing led regeneration development, with the eleventh site to be brought pending confirmation of plans adjacent to the site. A member also requested that sites across the north of the city be reviewed.

### **4. Planning Update**

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and provided an update on the applications to be considered at the January Planning Committee.

### **5. Illuminate Requests**

The City Solicitor outlined requests received to illuminate City Hall for Donors Day on 31 January, Covid 19 Day of Reflection on 9 March and Ramadan at the end of February. Cllr Bunting advised of a request she had received to illuminate City Hall for Batten Disease in June and would share the specific details on this with the City Solicitor. Party Leaders were content these requests were approved under the City Solicitor's delegated authority.

The City Solicitor advised a report will be brought to January SP&R committee for consideration outlining a draft Illuminate Policy. Members noted the proposed new approach which will be outlined in the report.

### **6. AOB**

#### **Waterfront Hall**

The update from the Strategic Director of Place and Economy was noted by members.

#### **Linenhall Library**

The Director of Finance outlined the finance request received from the organisation. It was agreed this would be brought to January SP&R committee for consideration and that the representatives from the Linenhall Library be invited to present this request to committee.

### **Malone Tornadoes**

The Director of Finance advised a funding request had been received from the mixed ability rugby team. It was agreed this should be brought to January SP&R committee with further details on the request to be outlined.

### **Pest Control**

Following discussion at December committee, the City Solicitor advised a report will be brought to January SP&R committee. Party Leaders were advised this would be published as a late report.

### **Display of Flags and Emblems Bill**

The Chief Executive brought to members attention correspondence received from Paula Bradshaw MLA on a consultation on a proposed Bill to regulate the display of flags and emblems from street furniture. It was agreed that Party's should consider their own responses to this consultation.

### **Termination of Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Project Management Agreement for Arboricultural Operations (Street Trees)**

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services outlined to Party Leaders the arrangements in place with DfI regarding the Arboricultural Operations (Street Trees) which involves the management of 14,000 street trees in the Eastern Division by the Council's Woodland and Recreation Team. Party Leaders agreed that further conversations take place with DfI on this agreement, to include revising the tree boundary managed by the Council.

### **Ballysillan Playing Fields**

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services outlined existing plans for a 4G floodlit pitch in the area and asked members to note the emerging issues with regards to pitch usage. Issues around sectarian graffiti, social media comments and threats to Council staff working in the area were noted. Party Leaders noted senior officers were meeting area reps and a further update may be brought to members.

### **IFA National Training Centre**

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reminded Party Leaders of previous discussions on this and advised that the IFA have recently announced a location outside of Belfast for this Centre. However, a request from the IFA to have a single pitch base at Blanchflower was outlined and discussed with members who agreed not to support

this request. This matter will now formally be brought to P&C committee. Party Leaders requested an update on the Councils Pitches Strategy be brought to members.

### **Follow up process on presentations to Party Leaders**

This item was raised by Cllr Long, and discussion followed on how best updates, feedback and follow ups are progressed following attendance by external organisations at Party Leader meetings. It was agreed that an item be added to the Party Leaders agenda the month following attendance a meeting to allow for updates to be brought.

### **Advertising panels at bus stops**

Following discussion and queries raised at October SP&R committee, the Director of Communications, Marketing & External Affairs provided an update on the approach, including the cycle of advertisements.