

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 13th March 2025

Attendance

Members:

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

Apologies: Councillor Ryan Murphy

Officers:

Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Pól Hamilton, Lead Officer, Community Provision (for Item 1)
Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 1, 4, 5 & 7)
Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager (for Item 2)
Stevie Lavery, Programme Manager (for Item 5)
Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Summer Community Diversionary Programme

The Lead Officer, Community Provision presented an update on the Summer Community Diversionary Programme for both July and August applications. Alderman Copeland declared an interest and left the meeting for this discussion. The Director of Neighbourhood Services also declared an interest and left the meeting during the discussion on the August applications.

Members discussed the agreed delivery model, the timeline in relation to the application process, the detail of the assessments undertaken by officers and the recommendations and options being presented for the 2025 programme.

There was detailed discussion on the July applications and Members discussed the recommended options outlined due to the July funding stream being oversubscribed. There were a number of issues and questions raised by Members for which the Lead Officer, Community Provision provided clarity. It was also noted that the detailed information requested by Members may need to be restricted when the report is considered by Members

at March SP&R Committee. The feedback provided to be further considered and incorporated into the report to March SP&R Committee.

2. York Street Interchange

The Senior Development Manager provided a briefing on the York Street Interchange project including the background/timeline and engagement that has taken place to date with the Department for Infrastructure. He referred to a report that went to February CG&R Committee which also included an update on the Placemaking and Active Travel Development piece of work on how the scheme could deliver positive improvements for the local community. He advised that it was agreed by the CG&R Committee that Members would receive a presentation from the Department of Infrastructure on the York Street Interchange Place Making & Active Travel Review at a future special meeting of the CG&R Committee and that Party Group Leaders would be kept up to date as this project progresses.

3. Closure of Connswater Shopping Centre

At the request of a Member the subject of the closure of Connswater was added to the agenda following CG&R Committee this week. Members discussed the many challenges that will arise for the current tenants as a result of the closure and discussed what support and/or assistance Council could potentially provide. In relation to a query raised on potential financial assistance the Director of Finance provided clarity. It was noted that given the tight timescales involved an update report would be brought to March SP&R Committee to seek agreement for Officers to further explore and to formally agree to issue correspondence to the Department for the Economy.

There was also detailed discussion on regeneration needs within the surrounding area and that engagement with key stakeholders is required in order to address going forward.

4. Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that the P&C Committee at its meeting in March had deferred consideration of the recommendations contained within the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service report. Members of the Committee had requested that the recommendations within the report were further considered by Party Group Leaders. Detailed discussion followed and a number of issues in relation to governance were raised

by Members, for which the Director of Neighbourhood Services provided clarity and outlined the due diligence that had been carried out to date. Given the need for further clarification on the issues raised it was agreed that a report on the options discussed be brought to the next meeting of Party Group Leaders in advance of a report going to P&C Committee for consideration

5. Community Support Plan 2025/29

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented the current proposals in relation to the development of the Community Support Plan 2025/29. He outlined the work undertaken to date on the proposed approach. Members also reviewed the dual process of proposed consultation and engagement plan in relation to next steps for the funding model. There was detailed discussion on the consultation proposals outlined and the Director of Neighbourhood Services to further consider in advance of a report going to March SP&R Committee for approval.

Members also discussed within the wider strategic context and that the review of Council owned community assets needs to be included in order to allow for evidence based decision making in relation to the strategic community support requirements across the City. It was agreed that the report to be brought to June SP&R Committee will include this review alongside the consultation findings.

6. 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 March Planning Committee.

Some issues were raised by Members in relation to current applications linked to the Strategic Site Assessments and the City Solicitor to follow up with the Director of Planning.

7. AOB

Belfast Stories

Members noted the upcoming Party Group Briefings being organised by the Programme Director and Strategic Lead for Belfast Stories. The briefing will provide Members with an update on the progress achieved to date on the project, including an update on the activity being undertaken to support the submission of the Outline Business Case.

Governance Review

The City Solicitor advised that Party Group Briefings were being arranged to allow Members to further consider in advance of consideration at April SP&R Committee.

Insourcing of Security

Members noted the update provided by the City Solicitor in relation to the proposed interim arrangements for Insourcing of Security. It was also noted that a report would go to March SP&R Committee for Members consideration based on the details provided.

Illuminate Requests

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

- **Brain Tumour Awareness month** – March 2025 - Date to be confirmed
- **World Down Syndrome Day** – 21 March 2025
- **Global Intergenerational Week** - 24 April 2025
- **Italy's National Day 2025** – 2 June 2025

March of Life UK - Holocaust Commemoration Event

Members noted the request for the use of City Hall Grounds on 27th April 2025 which would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

Planned Demonstration

A Member referred to an upcoming demonstration that was discussed at the recent Party Group Leader meeting. The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided an update following recent engagement with PSNI and further updates to be circulated to Party Group Leaders as they become available.

Call In

Members noted a Call in made in relation to Newington Football Club which had been deemed valid and noted that Counsel opinion was being sought.

Woodvale Park

The Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined an upcoming event, and Members noted the request in relation to Woodvale Park. There was consensus that the Chair of SP&R Committee would be consulted and the decision made under Officer delegated authority given the timescales involved.