

Minutes of Budget and Transformation Panel Meeting 10 December 2014

1. Attendance

Members:

Councillor Maire Hendron
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Pat McCarthy (for Councillor Tim Attwood)
Councillor Laura McNamee (for Councillor Michael Long)
Councillor Deidre Hargey (for Councillor Jim McVeigh)
Alderman Gavin Robinson

Apologies:

Councillor Tim Attwood
Alderman David Browne
Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Jim McVeigh
Alderman Christopher Stalford

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources
Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Jill Minne, Director of Organisational Development
Mark McBride, Head of Finance and Performance

2. SP&R and Shadow SP&R Reports

The Chief Executive advised that separate reports on the Rate Base (EPP), Cuts to Government Department Budgets and Potential Impact on the Council and the Non Domestic Property Revaluation would be presented to the Shadow SP&R meeting on the 19 December 2014.

The main Revenue Estimates and Capital Programme reports would be presented to Shadow SP&R Committee on the 16 January 2015 in line with the rates setting timetable. A further rate setting report will be presented to the 30 January 2015 although given that the central government funding for transferring functions will not be confirmed until late January 2015 a special Shadow SP&R Committee meeting and Council meeting may be required in early February 2015 to enable the District Rate for 2015/16 to be struck in advance of the statutory deadline of the 15 February 2015.

With regard to the update report on Connswater Greenway, which would be considered at the SP&R Committee on the 12 December 2014, the Director of Parks and Leisure was asked to provide an overview of the communication arrangements in place for those stakeholders who would be affected by the commencement of phase two works.

The Director confirmed that arrangements for communication with residents and business likely to be affected by the works was being put in place by the East Belfast Partnership Board and that Rose Crosier was having regular meetings with the Partnership regarding phase 2.

The Director agreed that where the Council could support the communication process then this support would be provided. He also agreed that following the meeting he would provide an update for Members on the scope of the communication exercise.

The Chief Executive referred to the paper seeking financial support from the Council for the proposed international conference - "Combating Hate Crime in Europe". She advised that there had now been a proposal to make this an international conference to be attended by approximately 80 international delegates. If this is to be held before the end of the financial year then it would however require additional financial support from the Council and this would be considered at the SP&R Committee meeting on the 12 December.

3. Leisure Transformation Programme

The Director of Parks and Leisure provided an update on the Leisure Transformation Programme and advised that the contract with GLL is due to be signed next week. He also advised that a conference for Leisure staff had been organised for next week and that the look and feel works for the centres would begin in December.

4. Party Group Leader Issues

The Chief Executive reminded the Panel that Party Group Leaders would be contacted shortly as part of the process for the review of the bonfire programme. Members requested that the outstanding matters with regard to the previous bonfire contract with Groundwork be placed on the agenda of the next budget and transformation panel meeting and that officers, should seek to obtain an update on the internal and external reviews undertaken on the contractors internal processes and the outcomes and actions arising from these reviews.

It was noted that design options for the Spanish Civil War commemorative window will be available in the New Year for submission to the Diversity Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Members referred to the recent discussion at the Health and Environmental Services Committee regarding homelessness and the apparent increase in people sleeping rough in the City Centre. The panel noted the initiatives which have been undertaken by the present and previous Lord Mayors and agreed that Officers should consider how the Council could co-ordinate initiatives with other public bodies and private sector businesses in the City which would provide short term support and longer term assistance in tackling homelessness in the City.

5. Impact of Cuts to Further and Higher Education Spending

The Chief Executive advised that QUB and Ulster University had requested a meeting with the Party Group Leaders regarding the cuts to further and higher education spending. The Panel felt that the meeting would be useful as it would provide the opportunity for Party Group Leaders to discuss strategic education issues and initiatives for the City with both universities. The Chief Executive agreed to circulate a draft agenda to Party Group Leaders in advance of the meeting.

6. Capacity Building and Representatives on new Planning Committee

The Panel received an update from the Director of Organisational Development regarding the Planning site visits to Bristol and Cardiff as part of the Planning capacity building programme.

It was noted that the further stages of the programme would be best targeted at those Members who were likely to be appointed to the Planning Committee.

It was further noted that parties would try to identify Members who are likely to sit on the 14 Member Planning Committee post March 2015 to ensure effective training.

7. Date of Next Meeting

To be advised.