

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 15th January, 2020

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston and Spence; and
Councillors S. Baker, Beattie, Brooks, Donnelly,
Ferguson, Flynn, Graham, Hanvey, Heading,
Howard, T. Kelly, McLaughlin, O'Hara, Walsh
and Whyte.

Also attended: The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McReynolds).

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Acting Director of City Regeneration
and Development; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Lyons and McAllister.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 27th November and 4th December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 6th January.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Schedule of Special Meetings 2020

The Committee approved the following schedule of special meetings for 2020 and agreed that they should commence at 5.15 p.m.:

- Wednesday, 26th February;
- Monday, 30th March;
- Wednesday, 22nd April;
- Tuesday, 30th June;

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- Tuesday, 29th September; and
- Wednesday, 21st October.

Presentations

St. George's Market Development Plan

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 4th December, it had agreed to receive at this meeting a presentation on the Development Plan for St. George's Market.

The Committee was informed that Mr. M. Williamson, ASM Chartered Accountants, and Prof. T. Stevens, Stevens and Associates, were in attendance for that purpose and they were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Williamson informed the Members that the award winning St. George's Market had opened in 1896 and that it was one of Belfast's most iconic buildings. The Market, which had been refurbished in 1999 at a cost of £5 million, now operated on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday and attracted around one million visitors annually. Approximately £1 million had been invested in the Market in 2019/20 and the introduction of live music at weekends and of a high profile restaurateur had had a positive impact.

He explained that there was now a need to build upon the Market's success to date, with an emphasis to be placed, in line with all public markets, upon bringing diverse people together, creating active spaces, linking urban and rural communities, promoting public health, providing economic opportunity and acting as a catalyst for regeneration and supporting cultural opportunities.

He drew the Members' attention to a list of recommendations which had been formulated, with a view to improving the efficiency, utilisation, quality of experience and profile/positioning of the Market, and to the associated short/medium term investment needs, and stressed that local market traders would be consulted throughout the development process.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the presentation on the future development of St. George's Market;
- ii. noted that a report would be submitted to its next monthly meeting setting out detailed proposals for the development of the Market and the associated operational and financial implications; and
- iii. agreed that a report on the current operation and potential development of Smithfield Market be submitted to a future meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following item is 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 Committee meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

Revenue Estimates and District Rate 2020/2021

(Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report in relation to the establishment of the District Rate and the Estimates of Revenue Expenditure for the year 2020/2021.

He outlined the budgetary pressures which the Council would face over the course of that period, together with the efficiency and growth proposals, and confirmed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had, on 17th December, agreed that the cash limit for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee should be £17,267,724. He pointed out that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee would, on 24th January, be required to agree the cash limits for the various Standing Committees, along with the District Rate, and that the process was required to be completed before the legislative deadline of 15th February.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee:

- i. approve a cash limit for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of £17,267,724 for 2020/21, together with the individual service limits set out within the report;
- ii. note the next steps in the rate-setting process; and
- iii. agree that the aforementioned decisions should not be subject to call-in, on the basis that it would cause an unreasonable delay which would be prejudicial to the Council's and the public's interests in striking the rate by the legislative deadline.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Tourism, Events and International Relations

Update on City Tourism Performance

The Director of Development submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on city tourism performance and to provide details of Visit Belfast's marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity to date.

1.2 The report also seeks authority for Visit Belfast to attend the monthly Committee meeting in March to present its business plan and a request for financial support for the financial year 2020/21.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. note the contents of the report and the progress to date; and
- ii. agree to receive a presentation on Visit Belfast's 2020-21 Business Plan the monthly meeting in March, including a request for Council support towards the work programme for the coming financial year.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

3.1 Members will be aware that Visit Belfast is the city's Destination Marketing Management Organisation (DMMO) dedicated to marketing Belfast as a city break, conference, day-trip and cruise ship destination. It also, in its visitor servicing role, manages the operation of three gateway Visitor Information Centres (VICs) including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, the Arrivals Desk at George Best Belfast City Airport and the Arrivals Desk at Belfast International Airport and a range of visitor servicing initiatives on behalf of Belfast City Council.

3.2 Visit Belfast represents over 500 tourism businesses and services across the tourism industry and its core purpose is to welcome and service visitors for Belfast and Northern

Ireland in order to generate an economic benefit for the city, creating jobs and wealth.

- 3.3 The role of Visit Belfast is to drive visitor numbers and increase visitor spend. As a public-private partnership, it provides a singular delivery mechanism for co-ordinating marketing investment and market engagement for the city. The organisation has a portfolio of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity across both leisure and business tourism.
- 3.4 2020-21 is the third year of Visit Belfast's four-year operational strategy (2018-22). Over the course of the four year plan, the ambition is to deliver a cumulative 1.6m bed nights, welcome 953,000 cruise visitors, service 3.7m enquiries and attract £546m into the local economy. Visit Belfast is on target to achieve the key performance indicators set at this stage of the four-year strategy.
- 3.5 Visit Belfast's strategy is a key part of our commitment to grow the visitor economy in Belfast and Northern Ireland and, in particular, in achieving the Belfast Agenda commitment to increase the value of out-of-state tourism to £500million and welcome 1.9m overnight stays by 2021.
- 3.6 City tourism continues to drive tourism on a global basis and Belfast continues to increasingly lift Northern Ireland tourism, contributing up to half of the NI visitor economy. Belfast continues to receive positive media and travel industry feedback – Conference and Incentive Travel Magazine voted Belfast their Best Events Destination for 2019 whilst Cruise Critic UK Editors' Picks Awards named Belfast as their Best UK & British Isles Port of Call.
- 3.7 Tourism, and in particular out-of-state tourism, has become a key economic driver for the city region, generating revenue and contributing to job growth. Private sector investment in hotel development saw a thousand hotel rooms come online in 2018, increasing hotel room capacity by almost a third and delivering the 5-year stretch target set in the Belfast Agenda.

An overview of performance to date this year is set out below:

Belfast Hotel Performance (January-October 2019)

- 3.8 Between January-October, room occupancy stood at 74.1%, down 5 percentage points on the same period of 2018. It is important to note that hotel room supply was 12.3% higher than in 2018 and as a result the volume of room sales

increased by 6.7% year-on-year. August continues to be the peak month for hotel occupancy – with 85.7% of rooms occupied that month.

Destination Interest and Visitor Servicing (January-October 2019)

- 3.9 Interest in Belfast as a destination of choice continues to rise. This is demonstrated by figures from Visit Belfast which show that their visitor servicing team handled 802,664 enquiries and welcomed 293,554 visitors through the doors in the period January-October. The profile of these visitors is broken down as 37% from Europe, 23% from GB, 21% NI, 6% North America, 9% Rest of the World and 4% from the Republic of Ireland. Visitor service support is also provided at core events in the city and beyond, most notably the 148th Open which was held at Royal Portrush in July.

Cruise Belfast

- 3.10 The City welcomed unprecedented numbers of cruise ships this year. 146 ships arrived into Belfast Harbour, carrying an estimated number of 275,000 cruise visitors to the city, an increase of 46% from 2018. The economic benefit from cruise tourism is estimated to be £12.5 million. During the 2019 season, a new dedicated cruise terminal, the first in Ireland, was opened by the Lord Mayor of Belfast providing a more focussed visitor welcome facility. Planning is already underway for 2020, and it is expected that 2019 cruise visitor numbers will be surpassed.

Conferences in Belfast 2019

- 3.11 Conference wins from Visit Belfast brought 91 conferences to the city in the year to date, generating an estimated 68,905 bed nights. The economic benefit is estimated to be in the region of £31.5 million. Given the long lead-in times, Visit Belfast is also working on attracting future events. They have achieved conference wins for the city worth £33.1m in the year to date. These conferences will take place over the coming years, and will deliver a cumulative total of 74,000 bed nights.

Leisure Tourism and Marketing

- 3.12 Since April 2019, six marketing campaigns have been delivered by Visit Belfast, worth a combined investment of £743,500. These have targeted potential visitors in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain as well as supporting the City Recovery Campaign in the domestic market. The aim of

these campaigns is to generate 255,000 leisure bed nights. Importantly, these campaigns allow Visit Belfast to lever significant partner income: £2 for every £1 of its investment in out-of-state marketing. Additionally, web and digital marketing has generated 1.8m visits to the visitbelfast.com website.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.13 There are no specific financial or resource implications attached to this report. The financial request from Visit Belfast is likely to be in the region of £1.9million for the coming financial year. This allocation will have to be approved by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, as part of the estimates and rate-setting process for 2020/21.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.14 There are no specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with neighbouring councils to support tourism development and those councils are also investing in tourism development and marketing within their respective areas.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that:

- i. Visit Belfast’s presentation be circulated to Members in advance of the meeting to allow for more detailed consideration;
- ii. Visit Belfast provide any available information around the environmental impact of tourism upon the City; and
- iii. information on conferences for the current financial year, as well as future projections, be included within the presentation by Visit Belfast.

Growing Businesses and the Economy

Social Enterprise and Co-operative Support

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on a range of issues discussed at the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 11th September.

The specific request included:

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- an update on the motion on Small and Medium Enterprises which had been referred to the Committee by the Council on 4th July 2016;
- exploring the feasibility of establishing in the next financial year a co-operative development fund for Belfast;
- providing details of the work of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) around regeneration and community development, of officers' work with CLES to date and how the Council's membership of CLES could add value to the Council's work in this area; and
- providing information on the Council's engagement with Preston City Council and with the city of Cleveland, Ohio, which had each developed successful co-operative initiatives, and learning from these initiatives.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- i. note the progress to date to support the social enterprise and cooperative sector;
- ii. agree the proposed activities to take forward the key issues raised at the meeting on 11th September 2019; and
- iii. approve an additional allocation of £15,000 to enhance the support available to support the growth of the co-operative sector in Belfast, building upon the existing delivery. It is recommended also that the budget to support the social enterprise and co-operative sector is uplifted in the next financial year, which will be brought to Committee for approval in March 2020.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 As Members will be aware, the commitments within the Belfast Agenda are based on a fundamental principle of enabling inclusive economic growth. To deliver on this commitment, the Council has developed a Draft Inclusive Growth Strategy, currently out to public consultation, which aims to ensure that the success of the city reaches every citizen. The consultation**

closes on 24th January and an updated and final Inclusive Growth Strategy will be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee following this.

- 3.2** In order to deliver on this commitment, there is a need to focus on a review of internal processes and practices, as well as considering how we directly support and influence other stakeholders to support our inclusive growth commitments. Key levers at the Council's disposal to deliver on this strategy include its procurement, human resources, planning and wider decision-powers through which inclusive growth can be embedded as part of service delivery. We can develop targeted employability and skills interventions, utilise the planning system to generate developer contributions and support the growth of key sectors including social enterprises and co-operatives. Recognising that inclusive growth is not the job of a few but of the many, a key area of focus within the draft strategy involves working with others (including the private sector, anchor institutions, wider public sector and community and voluntary sector) to create an inclusive city, through the establishment of an inclusive growth city charter.
- 3.3** Members will be aware that the economy in Belfast is dominated by micro and small businesses. More than 95% of businesses in the city employ 50 people or less. Since 2015, the Council has had statutory responsibility for a range of functions relating to business start-up and growth and our Economic Development team leads on the delivery of support services to increase the number of new businesses and to help existing businesses to grow, become more competitive and employ more people. From a wider Council perspective, there are also opportunities to explore how we can help local businesses to provide services to the Council through our procurement opportunities and supply chain development, and we can also provide support to skill up employees and make businesses more productive.
- 3.4** At the Council meeting on 4 July 2016, former Councillor McVeigh raised a motion regarding support for small businesses, which was referred to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. The motion included four key points:
- creating a substantial citywide investment fund to incentivise start-up and growth for example, through low interest loans;
 - engaging with the Department for Finance and Land and Property Services on the potential to offer rates

incentives, such as time-limited rates holidays, to start-ups or expanding SMEs;

- engaging a number of experts e.g. dealing with legal/financial issues, who can be loaned to a start-up or expanding SME free of charge for a 12 month period. Again, the Council will engage with the Executive to see if they will match fund this particular initiative; and
- appointing a full-time Belfast Small Business/Social Economy Commissioner who will proactively work to help grow this crucial sector of our economy. This person must have extensive knowledge and direct expertise of SME creation and expansion.

- 3.5 The motion was responded to at the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 10th August 2016, the recommendations within the report were agreed, an update has been circulated to Members. Since the introduction of the motion, there have been significant changes to the operating environment in this area of work in Northern Ireland. With the transfer of start-up, social enterprise and business growth functions to councils in 2015, officers have been working to enhance the offer to new starts and existing businesses. The commitments within the Belfast Agenda to supporting 4,000 new business starts by 2021 and creating 15,000 new jobs mean that we have developed close working partnerships across the public, private and community/voluntary sector to ensure delivery of these ambitions. Progress against each of the individual points within the motion has been circulated. However, as a snapshot, members are advised that the work of the Council in this financial year in the areas of business start-up and growth will help support the promotion and creation of more than 820 jobs and more than 350 new business starts. The development of the Enterprise Framework means that there is now a shared and agreed approach to supporting business start-up and growth. This includes a commitment to share resources and undertake research to ensure that the interventions supported continue to make a positive impact on the businesses and individuals engaged.

Exploring the Feasibility of Establishing a Co-operative Development Fund for Belfast

- 3.6 As Members will be aware, officers have undertaken research to understand what specific support is required from co-operatives and social enterprises and to inform the support provided by the Council. At the Special City Growth and

Regeneration Committee meeting on 27th November, Members received a presentation, which outlined the support in place currently to support the growth of the sector and the future plans to enhance this provision. The breadth of the Council support has recently been externally validated as Belfast City Council won the 'Council of the Year' award at the Social Enterprise NI Awards.

- 3.7 The focus of the Council resources is on raising awareness of the social enterprise and co-operative sectors in the city, ensuring that specialist one-to-one mentoring support is in place to help new starts and growing businesses and helping businesses to explore and develop solutions to social issues through sustainable business concepts.**

- 3.8 The concept of a co-operative fund to further enhance the Council's support has been raised on a number of occasions. To establish whether there is a need for such a fund in Belfast, officers have undertaken research across other cities that have implemented co-operative development initiatives in order to review their effectiveness and we have also engaged with the sector and co-operative partners locally. These have included Preston and Cleveland as well as Edinburgh and Glasgow. This research has identified that Glasgow is the only city that has operated a dedicated co-operative and enterprise fund. This fund enabled local co-operatives and social enterprises to apply for funding up to £25k to help them with their operational needs, skills, marketing, business development, governance, finance controls, service development and new markets. The delivery of this support is met with a budget of £500k per annum and a co-operative development unit based in the Council.**

- 3.9 This approach has worked well in Glasgow, however, it has been enhanced by a range of other activities, such as the use of Council assets to support co-operative development, in addition to capacity building support and consistent messaging to promote the sector. Recent research undertaken by Glasgow identified that the issue for co-operatives was not in accessing finance, but in fact managing the day-to-day finances of the businesses, in addition to sales, marketing and HR support. The research has recommended that while there is good feedback on the Glasgow's fund, the Council can add more value with this type of softer support.**

- 3.10 The approach that Belfast City Council has taken is to package together business advice and financial support to ensure that co-operatives get a wrap-around support service that takes account of their business growth needs while providing**

access to small amounts of finance to address any growth challenges. Taking account of members' ambitions to enhance the level of support, it is proposed that an additional budget of £15,000 is added to the current programme delivery. This will enable existing support to be enhanced and will cover a number of elements that are not currently eligible for support, such as the registration fee that co-operatives have to pay (can be up to £600).

- 3.11 With regard to funding support, the Committee has recently approved a crowd funding pilot with Crowdfunder UK. This pilot will provide support for developing and running a crowdfunding campaign for up to 10 social enterprises or co-operatives in the city. Belfast City Council will offer match funding of up to £5,000 for each of the organisations that deliver a successful campaign and meet the required eligibility criteria. There is also significant support available through both UCIT and UNLTD, details of which has been circulated, and they work closely with the Council and its delivery partners to ensure that those requiring access to financial support can access it in the most effective manner.
- 3.12 In addition to this, the finalisation of the Inclusive Growth Strategy and a cross organisational approach and corporate focus to inclusive growth will lead to further improvements in the Council's approach to the social enterprise and co-operative sector.

Details of the work of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) around regeneration and community development, outlining officers' work with CLES to date and how the Council's membership of CLES could add value to the Council's work in this area

- 3.13 Belfast City Council is a member of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). Officers have worked with the team at CLES on a number of issues, particularly relating to access to procurement, maximising local spend and measuring impact of local economic interventions.
- 3.14 One of the most significant areas of engagement between Belfast City Council and CLES has been in the development of the Local Multiplier Model (LM3). The principle of this model is to measure and track the scale and impact of Council spend in a local area, taking account of spend on both goods and services (through procurement) and also on salaries and wages.

This methodology is also used in a number of other local authorities (including Preston, Manchester and Salford) and this allows for comparisons and learning across a range of comparator cities. Belfast City Council has been using the LM3 model for the last four years to track the impact of our spend in the local area. Officers have also used the findings to target activity on certain categories in which Belfast-based businesses are currently under-represented.

- 3.15 CLES has also worked with the councils listed above to develop their respective approaches to enable inclusive economic growth and community wealth building. Recently representatives from Preston City Council visited Belfast to share their experiences and their methodology drew on the work that they had developed with CLES. We will continue to learn and work with CLES to develop our approach. Council officers can now run the LM3 model independently but the links with CLES will enable us to learn from other cities and benchmark our performance with these progressive cities. We have also engaged CLES to support with the development of Council's Employability and Skills framework and in the work that we are doing with Anchor Institutions.

Information on the Council's engagement with Preston City Council and with the city of Cleveland, Ohio, which had each developed successful co-operative initiatives and learning from these initiatives

- 3.16 Belfast City Council recently hosted a visit to the city by representatives from Preston City Council, working in conjunction with our local partner Development Trusts NI (DTNI). Preston's approach is based on a principle of community wealth-building focusing on how income can be held and recirculated within a local economy. This is achieved through a number of approaches including:
- promoting a more diverse blend of ownership models within a local economy, encouraging the creation and growth of small business, social enterprises and co-operatives;
 - increasing flows of investment within local economies by harnessing the wealth that exists locally. For example, Preston are utilising local authority pension funds to redirect investment from global schemes into local, commercially viable investment projects;
 - supporting fair employment by working with anchor institutions and large to explore approaches such as targeted recruitment from lower income areas,

commitment to pay the living wage and building progression routes; and

- adopting progressive approaches to procurement delivering social value and promoting inclusive procurement practices such as building capacity for smaller organisations and social economy enterprises.**

3.17 The key activities delivered through the Preston approach include;

- an anchor institution strategy, which has large placed-based institutions in Preston and Lancashire with a combined spend of nearly £1 billion per annum increasing spending to local suppliers to benefit the community;**
- a £100m place-based investment by their local government pension fund in student flats, hotel and office space. Through their City Deal, they want to explore a potential Lancashire Wealth Fund;**
- the expansion of worker-owned co-operative businesses through an innovative partnership with Mondragon Co-operative Corporation, University of Central Lancashire and Preston Co-operative Development Network. This work is currently in its infancy;**
- working with the Living Wage Foundation to make Preston one of the UK's first Living Wage Places;**
- exploring municipal ownership of a major city centre development; and**
- using their planning policies to encourage locally-based suppliers and labour on both public and private sector developments in the wider Preston economy.**

3.18 The approach adopted by Preston is similar to that of Cleveland, Ohio. Cleveland's initiative exists due to the unique partnership between the public sector, North-East Ohio's philanthropic community and University Circle's anchor institutions. This partnership leveraged the joint 3 billion USD of annual purchasing power of these anchor institutions in order to help catalyse and build community-based businesses that create jobs and ultimately drive economic stability for local low-wealth communities.

3.19 Preston City Council emphasised that it has been a long process to develop their current model, taking almost eight years. They consider that the secret to their success has been in pulling together the support and activities that are already taking place in order to achieve impact on a significant scale, as well as taking a partnership approach to this work. The BCC Inclusive Growth Strategy will also take this approach – seeking to work with partners and at scale to maximise impact.

3.20 While the work that Preston are undertaking is very impressive, it is clear that Belfast City Council is already engaging in or exploring the majority of the elements of Preston’s approach. The ongoing implementation of the inclusive growth strategy and the development and shaping of the Council’s ambitions year-on-year will ensure that Belfast City Council develops a strong and inclusive economy. At its meeting on the 17th December the Strategic, Policy and Resources Committee agreed the Revenue Estimates and District Rate for 2020/21. This included a budget of £611,500 to support inclusive growth. Specific proposals will be brought back to the Committee relating to how this budget will be utilised.

3.21 **Financial and Resource Implications**

The activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2019/20 Economic Development budget agreed by this Committee on 6th March 2019. The additional work to support the co-operatives and social enterprises will require an additional budget of £15,000. We also recommend that the budget to support the social enterprise and co-operative sector is uplifted in the next financial year, this will be brought to Committee for approval in March 2020.

3.22 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

3.22 Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of each project.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting examining the potential for replicating Glasgow’s co-operative development model in Belfast.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

York Street Interchange Project

The Committee agreed, at the request of Councillor O'Hara, that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for Infrastructure seeking an update on the York Street Interchange project and clarification on how it fitted with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report of October 2018 on the impact of global warming and the need to transition to a carbon neutral society, based on more sustainable transport infrastructure.

Dogs on Public Transport - Response from Translink

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 11th September, it had agreed, at the request of the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McReynolds), that a letter be forwarded to Translink, recommending that it review and amend its policy for the carriage of dogs on buses and trains, to allow for more dog owners to avail of public transport.

The Democratic Services Officer drew the Members' attention to a response which had been received from Mr. C. Conway, Group Chief Executive of Translink. Mr. Conway had explained that Translink had benchmarked its policy against those of other public transport companies in Ireland and Great Britain. That had found that its policy of allowing assistance dogs on all of its services at all times was in line with those companies, as was its policy of permitting all dogs to be carried on its services. However, in the latter instance, Translink provided staff and drivers with discretion to refuse entry in circumstances, for example, where dogs were unclean or poorly behaved or where other passengers had legitimate grounds for objecting, on account of allergies, phobias etc.

Mr. Conway had concluded by pointing out that Translink was of the view that its current policy balanced the aspiration for open access with the requirement for some mechanism to assess what was appropriate in protecting the needs of other passengers.

The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McReynolds) explained that Translink's response was at odds with paragraph 18.1 of its Conditions of Carriage policy, as publicised on the company's website, which had stated that "only small dogs or inoffensive animals" may be carried on its services. Since raising the issue, he had been contacted by numerous passengers outlining their negative experiences of travelling with their dogs on public transport, which had reinforced his concerns around the current policy. He pointed out that bars, cafés, hotels and other venues in the City were becoming increasingly dog-friendly and that Translink had an important role to play in that regard. He concluded by inviting the Committee to agree to seek a meeting with Translink representatives to discuss how the policy on the carriage of dogs could be enhanced, in light of the issues which he had raised.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the matter be added to the agenda for discussion at a forthcoming meeting to be attended by Translink representatives.

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Chairperson