

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum 12th November, 2020

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Christina Black (Chair)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Alderman George Dorrian
Councillor Fiona Ferguson
Councillor Dean Pankhurst (Joined the meeting for Alderman Dorrian)

Apologies: Alderman Sonia Copeland, Councillor Ciaran Beattie

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
John Walsh, City Solicitor
Noleen Bohill, Head of Commercial & Procurement Service (for item 3)
Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services for (Item 4)
Wendy Langham, Programme Director Belfast Destination Hub (for Item 6)
Alistair Reid, Director of Place and Economy (for Item 6)
Grainia Long, Commissioner for Resilience (Item 7)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Finance Update

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources presented to members the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2023/24 and the impact of the Estimated Penny Product (EPP) on the District Rate Income for 2021/22 – 2023/24 and the challenges involved in the setting of the rate this year given the current complexities. The Director advised that the deadline for setting the district rate is likely to be extended given the degree of uncertainty to 15th March 2021. A report will be brought to the SP and R Committee in November.

Members were also updated on the ongoing work being carried out by Ulster University to undertake Rates income modelling projections for the near future in order to identify the impact of Covid-19 on District Rates income for each of the eleven District Councils and the Regional Rate. An update will be provided to Members as this work progresses.

2. Operational Recovery Update

The Director of City Services provided an update to Members on organisational recovery and outlined current status of operational frontline services including an update on Malone House and Belfast Castle. Members were advised that the focus is on sustaining services given the majority of our services remain operational, including monitoring closely how resources are allocated across services. Members were updated on the role for Council in light of the new regulations and ongoing work with other bodies regarding enforcement of the 2020 Regulations.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update around Furloughed and Casual staff. Members of the Forum raised a number of specific queries in relation to furloughed and casual staff in Belfast Waterfront & Ulster Hall and GLL, and a full update was provided by the Director.

3. Commercial Plan

The Head of Commercial and Procurement Services provided an update for Members on the proposed Commercial Plan which will be presented to November SP&R, she outlined the future ambitions and proposals relating to commercialisation and income generation opportunities given the significant financial pressures being faced at present. Members also discussed the Corporate Pricing Strategy which will support the Commercial Plan that was deferred at October SP&R. A number of options were discussed on how best to take this work forward and the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources advised that the report is seeking approval to carry out a review at this stage, a further report will be brought back once the review is carried out outlining any proposals.

4. Inner City Kerbside Sort – Options Appraisal

The Director of City Services provided an update to Members on the Inner City Kerbside sort contract. August SP&R committee agreed to extend the current contract and to the commissioning of an options appraisal on the arrangements for future waste collections. Members were advised that an initial report on the collection options be presented to November committee but that further in depth work was required on financial considerations and implications of the proposed delivery models. This report would be brought back to a future meeting.

Members noted the report will also recommend an invite for a presentation, be extended to the Collaborate Circular Economy Network who represent business in NI that utilise recycled products collected by Councils.

5. Shared Prosperity Fund

The Chief Executive provided an update on a position paper produced for SOLACE NI, in relation to EU Successor Funding in Northern Ireland known as the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which will be presented to November SP&R. Members discussed the need to promote this work supporting the need for a partnership approach, which involves local government, in order to co-design and shape the funding to address local needs. Members discussed political engagement and how this might be brought forward, the Chief Executive to consider options outlined.

6. Belfast Destination Hub – OBC

Members received a presentation on the Destination Hub a key project under the tourism and regeneration pillar of the Belfast City Region Deal (BRCD). The Programme Director outlined progress made with regard to the Destination Hub Outline Business Case (OBC) and advised a report would be presented to November SP&R to seek approval to submit the OBC to the BRCD Executive Board in December 2020 for consideration. Members highlighted their support for the project and some queries were raised in relation to the Operating Model. The Chief Executive advised that any Operating Model will be considered at the next stages, and Members will be kept fully informed. The Belfast Destination Hub will be presented at each project stage to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as well as the City Deal decision making bodies.

7. Resilience Strategy

The Commissioner for Resilience provided an overview of conclusions arising from the public consultation and engagement on the draft Resilience Strategy, she outlined changes made to the document informed by the consultation. She advised that the document has already been considered and endorsed by the Resilience and Sustainability Board and a report will be presented to November SP&R for approval.

8. Notice of Motions

The City Solicitor discussed the proposal on a process for dealing with Notices of Motion previously considered by SP&R Committee. Members discussed in detail different options of managing the process of Notice of Motions, including aligning with the Council's corporate planning and policy frameworks. It was suggested by a Member that the Forum consider a working group to look at this issue in line with reviewing standing orders and the City Solicitor agreed to consider this option and that this issue needs further consideration.

Members also discussed current motions and the City Solicitor advised a report would be presented to November SP&R outlining status of each and a proposal on next steps. City Solicitor to circulate to Party Leaders and any comments submitted to the City Solicitor prior to November SP&R meeting.

9. Arc 21 – Correspondence

The Chief Executive outlined the current status of the proposed arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Plant. Antrim & Newtownabbey council have sent correspondence in relation to the plant to all Council Chief Executives. Given the technical nature and the timescale in collating the response requested, a response is currently being prepared. The Chief Executive discussed the option of having a workshop for Party Group Leaders to discuss the wider issues involved with Arc 21 and it was agreed this would be arranged.

10. Planning Update

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of the applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in December.

11. AOB

Wreath – Remembrance Sunday

Members discussed a UVF wreath that was laid at the cenotaph in the Garden of Remembrance at City Hall on Sunday 8 November, Remembrance Sunday. The Chief Executive advised that the placing of the wreath was not laid as part of the official act of remembrance organised by the Council and had since been removed. The issue of memorials was also raised. Members agreed that going forward the process around these issues would

need to be treated sensitively, and Party Leaders would continue to discuss and review processes to ensure the situation does not arise again.

Investigation Timeframes

The City Solicitor confirmed that the independent investigation being carried out by Peter Coll QC relating to Roselawn on 30 June was due to be completed end of November/early December.

St George's Market

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the issue raised by Councillor Gormley at October SP&R committee in relation to St. George's Market and the potential for waiving fees for businesses operating from the units. The Chief Executive advised that a recent request was also received from St. George's Market Traders Committee to request that the Council review the stall fee waiver and extend this period for an additional three months. Both issues will be included in a report at November SP&R for Members consideration.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall

Some Members raised an issue in relation to the process and subsequent decision around the financial pressures facing the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall and GLL at the November Council meeting. The Chief Executive and The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources advised that Councillors who contacted senior officers would have been made aware that both organisations were working through complex staffing and financial issues and if possible, contingency options which may have to be put to the Council for approval. Given the nature of the situation and the challenging timeframe it was not possible to provide a full update to all Party Leaders, as would normally be the case, prior to commencement of the Council meeting. The Director of Finance and Resources stressed that Council Officers made no proposals but rather stated the requirement from each organisation.

Transgender Day of Remembrance - Trans flag to fly November 2020

The City Solicitor outlined a request to seek permission for the Trans flag to fly on 20th November 2020 which was agreed by Members, City Solicitor to approve under delegated authority. A report to seek permission for 2021 onwards will be presented to SP&R committee.

Special Council Meeting re Food Poverty

The Chief Executive advised that a request by Councillor Beattie has been submitted to the Lord Mayor to hold a special Council meeting in relation to Food Poverty.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund. She advised that Officers continue to work through the process and criteria of the fund and a report will be brought to the next Forum meeting in advance of consideration at December SP&R.

Illuminate Process

Councillor Long asked that Members reconsider a request to light up City Hall for World AIDS Day, 1st December as previously raised by Councillor Nicholl. Members noted that requests could not normally be accommodated during the Christmas period and that other requests had been declined for this period, however it was agreed a report would be brought to SP&R to reconsider on exceptional basis for this specific request.

November Council Meeting

Councillor Ferguson sought clarification on some points in relation to standing orders and the November Council meeting. The City Solicitor to follow up with Councillor Ferguson.