

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

10th December 2020

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Christina Black (Chair)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Alderman George Dorrian
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Fiona Ferguson
Councillor Ciaran Beattie

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
John Walsh, City Solicitor
Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 8)
John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy (Items 5 & 9)
Christine Robinson, Strategy, Policy & Partnerships Manager (for Item 4)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Finance Update

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources presented to members an update on the rate setting process for 2021/22. He advised that Director challenge meetings had taken place and a report will be brought to December SP&R for Members consideration. This report will also include an overview of the priorities and work in progress to deliver the required level of efficiency savings and growth proposals for 2021/22. In relation to a query raised by a Member on the proposed extension to the deadline for setting the district rate, the Director advised he is still awaiting confirmation.

Members discussed the work being carried out by Ulster University to undertake Rates income modelling projections, particularly in relation to vacant properties and the impact on District Rates. An update will be provided to Members as this work progresses.

2. Current Restrictions

The Chief Executive provided an update to Members on the easing of restrictions shortly due to commence and advised that officers are currently assessing the impact on Council services, with a report to be presented to December SP&R Committee. She advised, clarification and guidance is being sought from the Executive Office on specific areas where required in relation to the new regulations. Some Members raised issues in relation to the role for Council regarding enforcement, and the Chief Executive advised that work is ongoing with other bodies regarding enforcement of the new regulations and this will be carried out in line with available resources.

3. Belfast Region City Deal

The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD), including an update on the development of Outline Business Cases (OBCs) and progress on agreeing a phased deal with the NI and UK Governments so that funding can begin to flow from 1 April 2021. Members also received an overview on Destination Hub a key project under the tourism and regeneration pillar led by Belfast City Council and the key regional projects funded through the BRCD that will transform the region's economy, including Belfast's economy, tackling fundamental barriers to inclusive growth, driving increased productivity and helping to drive economic recovery. An update report on these projects along with OBC progress will be brought to December SP&R.

4. Civic Engagement Platform (Your Say Belfast) Demonstration

The Strategic Policy & Partnership Manager carried out a demonstration on the recently launched new corporate platform for citizen engagement: 'Your Say Belfast'. An online web based platform that allows citizens to provide their input, and discuss their views on a wide range of city projects, initiatives and topics. She advised that guidance on use of the site and how to register had been circulated to all Members. Members to contact the Strategic Policy & Partnership Manager should they require individual tutorial session on how to use the site. A Member raised a query in relation Belfast: One Million Trees and the Strategic Policy & Partnership Manager to follow up.

5. NILGA - Transformation and Driving Practical Change in Local Government

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy updated members on a request from NILGA, seeking corporate views on local government reform to date. As well as what is needed to sustain councils and revitalise communities as part of post pandemic recovery and towards

a more locally driven suite of policies and resources for Northern Ireland. He outlined the proposed draft response that would be submitted to December SP&R for consideration. Party Leaders agreed to provide any additional comments to the draft response, by Monday 14 December in advance of SP&R.

6. Review of Active Belfast

The Chief Executive outlined that Members had agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of SP&R setting out the terms of reference for a review of the Active Belfast Limited Board, which will also consider membership and governance arrangements. She advised that a workshop would be organised for Party Group Leaders to discuss with a report to then be brought to a future meeting of SP&R. Members noted that a public recruitment process is planned for January to March 2021 for independent members of the Board.

7. Notice of Motions/Business Committee

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 the consideration of a Business Committee. There was a general consensus that the City Solicitor look at a Business Committee model that would be bespoke to the Council and would include all party representation. A report will be brought back to the Forum for consideration in advance of being submitted to SP&R Committee. It was agreed that this would be done in line with a review of standing orders.

8. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

Members received a presentation on the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund designed to support capital projects within the Belfast City Council area. The Director of Physical Programmes outlined the proposed underlining principles, funding allocation models and the use of thresholds for the fund. She advised a report will be presented to December SP&R to consider these proposals. Members provided some feedback which was noted by the Director and any further feedback to be forwarded to the Director in advance of SP&R. A further report will be brought in January on the specifics of the fund including the decision making process.

9. Development of Inclusive Growth Team

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy provided an update for Members on the development of the Inclusive Growth Team to drive forward the Inclusive Growth Strategy. A report will be presented to December SP&R for consideration.

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 January and February.

11. AOB

Nightingale Court Service

The Chief Executive advised that a request had been received regarding the use of the Waterfront for a Nightingale Court Service, given the pressure on existing courts provision with ongoing social distancing requirements. The Director of Physical Projects advised that this is a booking of space rather than a lease so it will be brought to SP&R Committee in December for notation only and that the ICC Board have approved.

Commercial Plan

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update for Members on the proposed Commercial Plan and Pricing Policy, which were referred back to SP&R following December Council meeting. Following discussion. It was agreed that Party Briefings would be held in January to discuss the plans in more detail and how best to take this work forward.

Installation of a memorial bench for Noah Donohoe

The Chief Executive advised Members of a request from the Family of Noah Donohoe to install a memorial bench in Botanic Gardens with a plaque attached in memory of Noah. Members agreed the request, and in empathy with the Donohoe family agreed that the cost will be covered by the Council given the exceptional circumstances of this tragic case.

Investigation Timeframes

The City Solicitor provided an update on the timeframe for the independent investigation being carried out by Peter Coll QC relating to Roselawn on 30 June. Members noted it would be completed in early January.

Operational Recovery

Alderman Copeland raised an issue in relation to contacting officers in key services, where staff are not back in the office and are still home working. The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources to follow up.