

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

14th January 2021

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Christina Black (Chair)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Nuala McAlister
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Anthony Flynn (for 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
Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services (Item 2)
John Greer, Director of Economic Development (Item 3 – Employment Academies)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Covid 19 Implications

The Chief Executive provided an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on council services. Members discussed the ongoing response to the tightened restrictions including recent announcements on working from home, closure of schools, shielding advice and increased infections rates. Members were advised that staff who are reporting as Covid positive and unable to work is increasing along with a rise in numbers who have to self-isolate due to possible exposure which is impacting on organisational capacity. In light of this the main focus for the organisation at present and in the immediate future is sustaining and maintaining operations for critical and vital services, a list of which was noted by Members. The Chief Executive advised given the ever evolving situation a report will be presented to January SP&R outlining current position and an update on contingency plans for those critical and vital services discussed. Work continues on supporting city messaging and compliance where appropriate.

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members on the new governance arrangements given the current situation for Committee meetings. Members noted the new format for fully remote meetings and the arrangements put in place by Democratic services to provide support for the Committee Chairs. Given the quasi-judicial nature of the Planning and Licensing committee they will continue in the current format along with the Council meeting. Alderman Copeland highlighted the need for all parties to be mindful of the number of Motions and Issues Raised being brought forward and asked that Members consider a more balanced approach given the increasing pressure on staff and the organisation at this time. There was general Consensus from Members for a more balanced approach and following discussion it was agreed Alderman Copeland to raise at the January SP&R meeting.

2. 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 the Estimated Penny Product (EPP) has now been notified from Land & Property Services (LPS) and the work carried out by the University of Ulster on Rates income modelling projections is now complete. Members were advised that the government has still not indicated whether or not funding for non-recurrent losses and rates income losses will be forthcoming. . A Report will be presented to January SP&R which will provide 2 options in the event that government funding is not available for 2021/22. It will also outline the timeline for next steps to ensure the setting of the District Rate by 1 March 2021 deadline (to be confirmed).

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources also highlighted that an underspend in the capital financing budget would be reported and Members will be in a position to decide on whether to allocate £500k to phase 5 of the alleygating scheme.

3. AOB

Procurement - Employment Academy Framework

In relation to an issue raised by Councillor Beattie at December SP&R committee the Director of Economic Development provided an update for Members on the procurement process for the Employment Academy Framework. He outlined the details of the Procurement Framework and the steps taken to ensure it is compliant with both procurement principles and with the council's Inclusive Growth Strategy. Members discussed some concerns they had and the Director agreed that these will be addressed in a report to January SP&R committee. It was noted that given the exercise is currently live, with a closing date of 15

January 2021 the concerns raised will be taken into consideration for future years. It was also agreed that the way forward is also discussed at the next Social Value Working Group meeting.

Thematic funding

Councillor Beattie raised an issue in relation to the community response for the thematic funding. The Director of City Services to follow up with the relevant officers.

Illuminate request

Members agreed to a request to light up City Hall in blue to mark the contribution and dedication of NHS staff & other frontline workers at this critical time.