

# **Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum**

## **11<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

### **Attendance**

#### Members:

Councillor Christina Black (Chair)  
Councillor Billy Hutchinson  
Councillor Nuala McAlister  
Councillor Donal Lyons  
Councillor Mal O'Hara  
Alderman Brian Kingston  
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 (Items 1 & 2)  
Aidan Thatcher, Director of Planning and Building Control (for Items 4 & 5)  
Alison Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager (for Items 6 & 8 Bonfire Approach 2021)  
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### **1. Covid 19 Planning**

The Chief Executive provided an update on the recent plan published by the NI Executive which details the pathway out of the current restrictions and the approach to move forward over the next few months. Given the absence of specific timelines for each step in the pathway document published, the Chief Executive advised this will impact on the organisational approach to recovery and ongoing COVID management for 2021/22. Members noted the proposed organisational recovery timeline which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with the NI Executive formal regulations review dates. The Director of City Services outlined key issues around service recovery and workforce planning in the coming months. A report will be brought to March SP&R Committee.

### **2. Port Health Update**

Members discussed the current issues and challenges faced by the Port of Belfast as a result of Brexit and noted an update report had been considered by February SP&R Committee. The Chief Executive updated Members on recent engagement with DAERA and FSA, she

advised a letter has been drafted outlining the key areas of concern which require urgent resolution and copy of the letter when issued will be circulated to Party Group Leaders.

The City Solicitor provided an update on the legal opinion sought following February SP&R Committee on the specific responsibilities conferred on councils in relation to this function. A report on next steps will be brought to March SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

**3. Action Plan arising from recommendations of Peter Coll report**

Members agreed at February SP&R Committee that a report would be brought back to March committee on the recommendations arising from the Peter Coll report. The Chief Executive advised that an action plan, on how the recommendations would be implemented and monitored has been drafted. Consultation has commenced with individual Parties to capture any issues or further recommendations Members may have which will be reflected in the final action plan presented to March SP&R Committee.

**4. Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council – Changes to their draft LDP**

The Director of Planning and Building Control advised Members that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) have undertaken an additional consultation on their draft Plan Strategy. Members noted that an agreed corporate response was previously submitted to LCCC. He advised that this consultation was dealing with some focussed changes they are proposing to make to the strategy, prior to submission to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for consideration. Members noted the proposed changes and the proposed response which would be presented to March SP&R Committee. In relation to some queries raised by Members the Director and City Solicitor advised that engagement with other councils on cross boundary planning issues was standard process.

**5. Planning Update**

The Director of Planning and Building Control provided an update on the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) Independent Examination (IE) hearing sessions in relation to the Belfast Local Development Plan draft Plan Strategy 2035. Members noted that these sessions were now complete. The Director outlined the next steps and anticipated timelines for the report back from the Planning Appeals Commission.

The Director updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of the applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in March and April.

In relation to some queries raised by Members on the current status of the Strategic Site Assessment piece which was being undertaken in relation to city wide approach, the Chief Executive advised that an update will be presented to a future meeting of the Forum.

**6. Alleygates Phase 5**

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided an update on the proposals for phase 5 of the alley gating scheme and outlined the option to allocate the £500K funding equally across the four quadrants of the city. Given that this phase is limited and is being funded from an underspend in the capital financing budget, the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources highlighted the need to carry out a survey to identify future need. This work would enable Members to consider what options are available for the longer term financing of the scheme. It was noted this work should be progressed simultaneously with implementation of Phase 5.

Members also discussed the wider strategic context of the scheme and highlighted that other options are explored for neighbourhood regeneration. A report outlining the proposals discussed will be brought to March SP&R Committee.

**7. Standards Committee/Brexit Committee**

The City Solicitor outlined that the Standards Committee will constitute from June 2021. He also asked Members to consider if the Brexit Committee is reconstituted this coming June or if the work of the committee can now be considered by the existing standing committees. Members to consider with Parties and this will be discussed at a future meeting.

**8. AOB**

**Bonfire Approach 2021**

Members discussed the programmes of work associated with bonfires and noted that the extent of restrictions which may be in place in July, is as yet unknown and therefore the delivery of all elements of the programme of work for 2021 might not be possible. The Neighbourhood Services Manager outlined the key decisions required at this stage and advised a report will be brought to March SP&R Committee which will include the beacons element of the programme and options for alternative funding arrangements to support cultural expression.

**Holylands Area**

The Chief Executive informed the Forum that she has been having ongoing discussions with statutory agencies in relation to issues raised about anti-social behaviour in the Holylands

area. Members discussed concerns in relation to the Holylands and surrounding area on St Patrick's Day with the added challenge of current restrictions. The Chief Executive highlighted that work will continue with the relevant statutory agencies and on messaging around compliance in the week ahead. Members discussed the longer term recommendations within the Holyland and Wider University Area Strategic Study and how this can be progressed.

### **Illuminate Requests**

The City Solicitor advised he had prior to the meeting circulated a request to Party Leaders to light up City Hall on Thursday 11th March to mark European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism. It was noted that responses received had indicated there was general consensus.

He outlined a further request to light up City Hall in purple to mark the upcoming Census Day 2021 which Members agreed. In relation to a query raised on the criteria for Illuminating City Hall he advised a report on a review of the current criteria and the criteria for Books of Condolences will be added to the agenda for a future meeting.

### **James Connolly Belfast Heritage Trail**

The City Solicitor outlined correspondence received from Redhead Exhibition requesting assistance from the Council in relation to a James Connolly Belfast Heritage Trail – the trail will entail placing a plaque at a number of sites of historical significance throughout the City and City Hall is proposed as one of the locations. Members discussed a number of issues that needed to be considered in relation to this request and it was agreed the City Solicitor will circulate a draft report to Party Leaders for comment, in advance of being submitted to March SP&R Committee.