

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

12th August 2021

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Áine Groogan (Chair)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Nuala McAlister
Councillor Brian Heading (for Councillor Lyons)
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Alderman Brian Kingston (Cllr Pankhurst joined the meeting for Ald Kingston)
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Michael Donnelly (for Councillor Beattie)

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
Paul Gribben, Head of Digital Services (for Item 2)
Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 4)
John Greer, Director of Economic Development (for Item 5)
Alistair Reid, Director of Place and Economy (for Items 6 & 8)
Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner (for Item 7)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

Introductions:

The Chief Executive introduced to Party Leaders, Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control and Cathy Matthews, Director Resources and Fleet both of whom have recently been appointed. Members welcomed the new Directors and wished them well in their new roles.

1. Finance

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance outlined for Members details of the council's financial position for Quarter 1 2020/21 and Members discussed the key drivers for the forecasted underspend. In relation to an issue raised, Members also discussed the impact on Capital Financing due to the current market volatility and increased prices for contractors, that could not have been foreseen. The Director of Physical Programmes advised that Officers are working closely with council appointed contractors on a case by case basis and that any potential impacts/issues identified will be brought to committee for Members consideration.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance advised that work is due to commence on estimates for 2022/23 and an initial report outlining the 2022/23 rate setting process will be presented to the August SP&R committee. He outlined that the report would be recommending that the same district rate increase will be levied on domestic and non domestic properties. A report on the Quarter 1 financial position will also be presented to August SP&R committee.

2. Cyber Security Update

The Head of Digital Services presented to Members a detailed proposed cyber programme of work for the protection of Council networks, data and services. He discussed the importance of this programme of work and outlined the fundamental challenges involved with cyber security and the key decisions that Members would need to make. Members noted that a report will be brought to August SP&R committee for consideration.

3. NI Protocol

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members on recent discussions in relation to the NI Protocol and the Command Paper presented by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in July, a copy of which was previously circulated. Members noted that an update report was due to be considered by the Brexit Committee this month. It was agreed a copy of this report would be circulated to Party Leaders.

Members also discussed the issues and challenges faced particularly in relation to the Port of Belfast, as a result of Brexit and noted that work has been progressing on the key areas of concern with DAERA and FSA. Members had previously discussed issuing pre-action protocol letters to DAERA, etc. outlining these concerns, however Members agreed that given that work was now progressing this would not be required at present. Further updates will be provided.

4. Leisure Update

The Director of Physical Programmes updated the Forum on the development and implementation of the leisure assets capital programme. Members had a detailed discussion and some issues were raised in relation to some of the older leisure facilities that require maintenance which need to be addressed.

The Director advised that the report to August committee will be an update only and that Members would not be asked to make any decisions at this stage in relation to the leisure

assets capital programme. Members also noted that the report to August Committee would be recommending that a special SP and R be held to consider the findings from the review undertaken by Space and Place Architects. It was agreed that party group briefings would also be arranged at Members request. Once the date of the special SP and R committee has been agreed, the Director will, where possible schedule the briefings in advance of the committee meeting.

5. The Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission 'Reset for Growth' report – BCC Response

The Director for Place and Economy presented to Members the final recommendations stemming from within the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission, 'Reset for Growth' report and outlined the proposed Belfast City Council response. The Chief Executive advised a report would be presented to August Committee outlining the proposed response and recommending the committee endorse the contents of the 'Reset for Growth' report.

Following detailed discussion on the housing retrofit programme element Members asked that consideration is given to fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city and how this might be addressed. It was requested that fuel poverty and the links to climate change be discussed at a future meeting. In relation to a query raised by a Member on the development of green skills to carry out the housing retrofit programme the Director advised that work in this area is underway.

6. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance provided an update on the Belfast Region City Deal. He advised that further to the update to the Forum in June work has continued at pace on the draft Deal document. He also advised that as part of the Deal, partners led by Belfast City Council have been developing a programme business case for the £125m BRCD digital innovation programme, which sets out the strategic areas of intervention under the Digital pillar. A report will be brought to August SP&R committee which will include an update on the digital innovation programme business case and will also outline the role of Belfast City Council as the Accountable body for the Deal.

The Director of Place and Economy updated Members on the Outline Business Case for the Destination Hub. He advised that work is progressing at pace on both the commercial and management cases and an update will be brought to a future meeting of the SP&R committee.

7. COP 26 - United Nations Climate Change Conference

The Climate Commissioner provided a detailed update for Members on COP 26, the next annual UN climate change conference taking place from 31 October to 12 November in Glasgow. She outlined key areas of work that Belfast would be involved in during the lead up to the conference including key awareness rising initiatives. Members raised a query in relation to delegates from Belfast and the Commissioner will follow up and advise Members accordingly. A report will be brought to a future SP&R committee in advance of the conference.

Members also noted a report would go to August SP&R committee seeking approval for an engagement and capacity building programme for young people focused on COP 26.

8. Planning Update

The Director of Place and Economy updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning committee in August.

9. AOB

Standards and Business Committee

The Chief Executive provided an update on the decisions which have been previously agreed. Members noted a report will be brought to August SP and R committee outlining the actions needed to establish the Committee.

Belfast Bikes – Call in

Members noted an update on a Call in made in relation to Belfast Bikes. Counsel opinion which determine that the Call in has merit will be considered by Council at the September meeting.

Cleansing

Members discussed a number of issues in relation to cleansing services and street cleansing. The Chief Executive to follow up with the Directors in City and Neighbourhood Services. It was also agreed that the process for communications is kept under review for when bin

collection issues arise. Members noted that a report on street cleansing, specifically in the City Centre would be brought to a future SP&R committee for consideration.

Pest Control

Alderman Copeland raised an issue in relation to recent media on the issue of Pest Control. Members noted that a report would be submitted to September P&C Committee in relation to this matter. Members agreed that it would be useful to arrange a future meeting with the relevant housing bodies to discuss ongoing concerns.

Roselawn Cemetery

In relation to a query raised by Alderman Copeland Members noted an update report on maintenance at Roselawn Cemetery would be brought to a future meeting of the P&C Committee.