

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

16th September 2021

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Áine Groogan (Chair)
Councillor John Kyle (*for Cllr Billy Hutchinson*)
Councillor Nuala McAlister
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Alderman Brian Kingston
Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Fiona Ferguson

Apologies: Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
John Walsh, City Solicitor
Christine Sheridan, Head of Head of Human Resources (for Item 2)
Alistair Reid, Director of Place and Economy (for Item 6)
Cathy Reynolds, Director City Regeneration & Development (for Item 7)
Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 5 & 7)
Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services (for Item 7)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Finance

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources outlined for Members details of the council's Statement of Accounts, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31 March 2021. The Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position. A report will go to September SP&R for Members approval in advance of the accounts being published by the 30 September deadline.

2. Resourcing

The Head of Human Resources presented an update on Employee Resourcing as requested by a Member. She advised that whilst recruitment activity was understandably impacted during the lockdown period, it is now continuing at pace. Some Members raised issues in

relation to current challenges in cleansing services and street cleansing. The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that a report was submitted to September P&C committee, and it was agreed that Neighbourhood Cleansing Services would be presented through the Area Working Groups.

In relation to a query raised by a Member in relation to the Furlough Scheme ending in September, it was noted that all staff on the scheme will have returned to work by end of September. Following discussion Members requested that Employee Resourcing is considered regularly at future meetings.

3. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Belfast Region City Deal and Members discussed the Infrastructure pillar level budget and the Executive Boards' recommendations that whilst all three infrastructure projects cannot be delivered in full under the funding envelope, a ring fenced sum is set aside to enable a phased approach to BRT 2.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the proposed timeline for approval and signing of the Deal Document for agreement with Government Partners. He advised that approval for the Deal Document and Governance would be required from Partners in October, and a report would be brought to October SP&R for Members consideration. In light of this, the next Council Panel meeting to be hosted by Belfast will be rearranged to meet in early November.

4. Leisure Centre Signage

The City Solicitor referred Members to a report that was previously deferred by SP&R committee in relation to language or languages signage to be used in leisure facilities with a city-wide catchment area. He advised that a report on this would be presented to September SP&R committee for Members consideration.

5. Lagan Gateway Update

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided members with an update on the Lagan Gateway and outlined the next steps for the project. Following detailed discussion, it was agreed that Members would further consider and discuss at the next meeting of the Party Group Leaders Forum.

6. 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 October.

7. AOB

Dog Warden Service

The Director of City Services provided an update on a point of information in relation to the Dog Warden Service, which was noted by Members.

Residual Waste Disposal

The Director of City Services outlined for Members the current status of the Residual Waste Contract and the decisions that Members would need to consider in relation to the contract. She advised a detailed report would be presented to September SP&R committee. There were a number of issues raised in relation to the medium and long term options for the disposal of residual waste and wider issues including the proposed arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Plant. It was agreed that a workshop be held for Members to discuss the issues raised.

Institutional Investment - Expression of Interest

Members discussed institutional investors/strategic development partners and how these have worked in other UK Cities. The City Solicitor discussed the proposal to undertake a soft market testing exercise in order to further explore. Members requested further detail and it was agreed a report would be brought to September SP&R committee. In relation to an issue raised by a Member it was also agreed an update report on the Strategic Sites Assessment (SSA) programme of work will be brought to a future committee meeting.

Community Diversionary Festivals Programme

At the Council meeting in July 2021 it was agreed to allocate funding to a diversionary and festival programme. The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided Members with the detail of the assessment of the most recent application which will be considered at September SP&R committee.

King George V Playing Fields

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided a briefing for Members on the status of a bonfire currently being built at King George V Playing Fields. He discussed the decisions that would need to be considered by Members and a report outlining these decisions will be considered by September SP&R committee.

Colin Interpretive Heritage Trail

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that a request had been received from the Colin Neighbourhood Partnership to place an interpretive panel from the planned Colin Heritage Trail within the Council's new park in Colin (Páirc Nua Chollann). He outlined for Members the series of interpretative panels to be included in the heritage trail. A report will be presented to September SP&R committee, Members noted that the decision to be considered at SP&R is only in relation to the panel within the Council's new park.

Submission re Boundary Commission

Councillor's O' Hara and Lyons declared an interest in relation to this item in that they are members of the Belfast Harbour Board. It was noted when the submission is brought to SP&R committee, they will both leave the meeting.

The City Solicitor outlined for Members the proposed submission in response to the Local Government Boundary Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations 2021-22. Following discussion and given the deadline for submissions is 21 September, there was consensus that the response is submitted and will be subject to ratification by September SP&R committee.

St George's Market

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the rent-free period for St George's Market previously agreed by Council. He advised that a request to extend the rent-free period for a further four weeks has been received from St. George's Market Traders. Members noted the request and that a report would be presented to September SP&R committee for consideration.

Request for support for COP 26 Climate Business Conference

Further to the update considered by August SP&R Committee on the COP 26 conference and the key areas of work that Belfast would be involved in. The Chief Executive advised Members that a report would be submitted to September SP&R committee seeking support

to host a prominent climate business conference in Belfast ahead of the COP 26 conference which Members noted.

Recent media

Alderman Kingston raised an issue in relation to recent media. The City Solicitor to consider and will update Members accordingly.