

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

14th October 2021

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Nuala McAlister
Councillor Donal Lyons
Alderman Brian Kingston
Alderman Jim Rodgers (for Alderman Copeland)
Councillor Ryan Murphy (for Cllr Beattie)
Councillor Anthony Flynn (for Cllr O'Hara)

Apologies: Councillors Groogan, Beattie, O'Hara and Ferguson, Alderman Copeland

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
John Walsh, City Solicitor
Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner (for Items 5 & 6)
Nora Largey, Divisional Solicitor (for Item 4)
Emer Husbands, Strategic Performance Manager (secretariat)

1. Finance

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources highlighted to Members that the annual rate setting process was underway and there were a number of additional costs including the increase in national insurance contributions which now need to be taken into consideration. In addition, members will need to make decisions in relation to costs associated with the pre-treatment of waste. An update report will be brought to the October SP and R Committee with more detail on the revenue estimates and rate setting scheduled for November.

2. Recruitment Update

Following a request from Members, the Chief Executive provided an update on a number of issues in relation to staff recruitment and retention. In particular, she highlighted the relatively low staff turnover rates for the previous two years, which was 7.3% from 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020, and 5.2% for 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. To date, **232** posts have been filled since April 2021, a further **69** posts are being progressed at present(at various stages of the

recruitment process), **67** posts are awaiting trawl/offer stage and departments have indicated that **78** jobs will be brought to CMT for approval over the coming weeks, giving a total of **446** posts as at 7th October 2021. This is higher than usual and in the main was a result in the slowdown of recruitment due to the pandemic. Additional support has been brought in to help clear the bottle neck to get the posts filled as quickly as possible. A query was raised in relation to a shortage of Environmental Health Officers and the Chief Executive agreed to get further information on this. The members of the Panel agreed to receive an update on staff recruitment on a quarterly basis.

3. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Chief Executive informed the panel that final City Deal document would be presented to October Committee for approval and commended the city deal team for all their hard work in getting to this position, which is a key milestone in the delivery of the deal. All the BRCD partners are also going through approval processes during October and it is hoped that formal sign off by the NI Executive would follow in mid November. This would then allow the deal to be formally signed and members would be kept updated on arrangements on any possible event.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance and Resources also reminded members that on the signing of the deal Belfast City Council would become the accountable body, and work was progressing to ensure appropriate processes and resources were in place to undertake this function.

4. City Centre Bye-Laws

The Divisional Solicitor outlined to the panel the key aspects of the draft proposals for the city centre bye laws which would be presented to the SP and R committee in October. Members raised a number of queries in relation to the need for supporting guidelines on implementing and enforcing the bye laws, as well as details of fees attached to individual applications which have yet to be determined. The City Solicitor agreed to brief any parties who request more information on the draft document in advance of the Committee meeting.

5. Proposal for BCC to sign up to the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration

The Climate Commissioner presented a request from Glasgow City Council to sign up to the Food and Climate declaration. She outlined the key commitments in the declaration and

agreed to bring a report to the SP and R Committee requesting that the Council support the request.

6. COP 26 - United Nations Climate Change Conference

The Panel received a short presentation from the Climate Commissioner on COP26, including background to the event, the main objectives and BCC's commitments to supporting climate change. She also highlighted a number of ongoing activities across the city and further detail on these will be circulated to party leaders on a weekly basis.

7. CMT/Party Group Leaders Away Day

The Chief Executive outlined a number of issues including priorities, finance, succession planning, the Belfast Agenda and governance for discussion between Party Leaders and CMT as part of a joint planning session. She suggested that, if possible, the meeting would take place in person, at a suitable venue, and proposed dates would be circulated to Party Leaders. Party Leaders were also asked to forward their priorities for the session.

8. Planning Update

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in October.

9. AOB

November PGLCF Meeting

Due to the next meeting taking place on Armistice Remembrance Day, it was agreed that the PGLCF meeting would have an earlier start time of 9.30 am, with the aim of finishing before 11.00 am. If the meeting was not over, there would be a pause of 5-10 mins just before 11.00am.

Bonfires Review

The Chief Executive informed the panel that external support is being brought in to assist with the Bonfire review and a report would be taken to the November Committee on its progress. It was agreed that party group leaders would feed into the review.

Heritage Trail

Following the recent request to install an interpretative panel for the Heritage Trail, the City Solicitor outlined he had now received a number of requests from other organisations and he would present these to the SP and R Committee in October.

Illuminate Requests

The Panel agreed that the City Hall would be illuminated on 22nd October in honour Jeffrey Dudgeon, to mark his successful challenge in relation to the decriminalisation of homosexuality 40 years ago.

Flying of Transgender Flag – 20 Nov 2021

The Panel agreed to the flying of the Transgender flag on 20th November on an annual basis to mark their day of remembrance.

Casement Park

The City Solicitor informed the panel that he had received correspondence in relation to a judicial review into the plans for Casement Park as result of challenge by residents. A report on the Council's response to this will be brought to the SP and R Committee in October.

Standing Orders –High Court Ruling on Call in

The City Solicitor outlined to members the recent high court ruling into call in of Planning decisions in Derry and Strabane City Council. The implications of this will require an update to the Planning Protocol and Standing Orders which will be presented to committee. However, the main issue is that decisions made by the Planning and Licensing committees are now subject to call in with immediate effect.

LGBTQ – City Centre Hub

The Chief Executive informed the panel that she had received a letter requesting financial support to undertake a feasibility and scoping exercise for a LGBTQ hub in the city centre. Councillor Flynn provided the background to the request and the council's ongoing discussions over a number of years on taking a LGBTQ hub forward. The Chief Executive agreed to circulate the letter to members of the panel and also to submit the funding request to the SP and R Committee.

