

Brexit Committee

Thursday, 14th February, 2019

MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston and McGimpsey;
Councillors Beattie, Canavan,
Carson, Hutchinson, Lyons, McAteer, O'Hara and
Pankhurst.

In attendance: Mr. N. Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. G. Long, Commissioner for Resilience;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. K. Walsh, Business, Research and Development
Manager;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Business, Research and Development
Officer; and
Miss C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Attwood, Campbell, Dorrian, Dudgeon and Reynolds.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th February.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentations

Youth Panel

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting a deputation from the Youth Panel which included Miss M. Aaroy, Miss A. McCallin and Miss Z. Conlon from the Belfast Youth Forum, Miss N. Mallagnah from the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Mr. P. Smith and Ms. T. Connolly from Our Future, Our Voice and Mr. L. Patterson from the UK Youth Parliament.

The deputation indicated that the purpose of the presentation was to update the Committee on the views and concerns of young people with regard to Brexit.

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The Members were then provided with a presentation on Brexit and how young people in Northern Ireland were concerned with the impact of Brexit on services including:

- Health and education;
- Identity and racism;
- Freedom of movement; and
- Rights and the Good Friday Agreement.

The deputation informed the Committee that uncertainty around the future of essential services such as healthcare and education with regard to funding and cross-border logistics should be a priority concern. They highlighted the fears of young people with regard to their future education and the potential fees associated with universities.

They further advised that young people had a lack of understanding on what a deal or no-deal Brexit would look like for them and, in particular, how their freedom of movement would be affected.

The deputation presented questions to the Members with regard to how the Council could assist young people to understand Brexit, future funding and investment, and protecting workers' rights after Brexit.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the deputation from the Youth Panel for their presentation.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to receive further presentations from the Youth Panel as they felt it would be beneficial to decision making to have an understanding of the views of young people in Northern Ireland.

**Correspondence Received -
Mr David Sterling – EU Settlement Scheme**

The Members were reminded that, at its meeting on 6th December 2018, it was agreed that the Committee would write to Mr. David Sterling, Head of the Civil Service, to consider the provision of an advice service to support EU citizens who are resident in Northern Ireland with making EU Settlement Scheme applications.

The Committee was advised that a response dated 1st February had been received.

In the letter, Mr. Sterling outlined how immigration was a priority, given the profound contribution that EU nationals make to the Northern Ireland economy and society. He added that the Advice Sector had been identified as a priority one area for Brexit day one delivery plans and additional funding had been requested to prepare the Advice Sector for an increase in demand.

The letter detailed the Home Office's Safeguarding Strategy, which had been developed to ensure that the Scheme was accessible to vulnerable EU nationals and the range of support mechanisms it was planning to implement, including:

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- Toolkits;
- Grant Scheme;
- Digital Assistance;
- Chip Checker Locations.

The Committee noted the correspondence received from Mr. David Sterling, Head of the Civil Service.

EU Settlement Scheme Information Day - Update

(Ms. K. Walsh, Business, Research and Development Manager, attended in connection with this item)

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the EU Settlement Scheme.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the update provided.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Members are reminded that a report was brought to the January meeting of this Committee outlining plans for an information session on the EU Settlement Scheme in City Hall. It was agreed that local organisations who successfully obtain funding from the Home Office funding scheme to allow them to support EU citizens to apply to the Scheme, be invited to provide the information at the session. It had also been proposed that the information session be held in late February/early March.

We are aware that a local consortium has applied for funding from the Home Office Fund but a decision has not yet been made on their application. However it has emerged that if they do receive funding it must be spent in the financial year 19/20.

The scheme is currently open to some EU citizens and their family members and will open fully by 30 March 2019. The current advice from the Home Office is that the deadline for applying will be 30 June 2021, or 31 December 2020 if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. The Home Office’s website also advises ‘You can apply now if you’re eligible, but you’ll

probably get pre-settled status rather than settled status if you do not currently have 5 years' 'continuous residence'.

It was announced on 21 January 2019 that there will be no fee when the scheme opens fully. Anyone who has applied already, or who applies and pays a fee during the test phases, will have their fee refunded and details of the refunds process will be published shortly.

Members are advised that the next meeting of Migrant Forum has been scheduled for 4th March and that an update on the EU Settlement Scheme is on the agenda for this meeting. Through the Migrant Forum officers will liaise with the Executive Office and where appropriate we will work with them in disseminating information around the EU Settlement Scheme

Given these circumstances it is suggested that the Information Session is moved to April and that we use the meeting of the Migrant Forum in March to get their views on the format the information session should take, and what channels we should use to promote the session to ensure that all relevant groups are aware of it.

A briefing document on the EU Settlement Scheme is attached as appendix 1 which includes information on the difference between settled and pre-settled status.

Officers will disseminate this information to businesses and community and voluntary organisations through existing networks. We will also continue to participate in the Home Office teleconferences in relation to the Scheme and update Members as appropriate.

Financial and Resource Implications

To deliver the Information Session will require the use of the City Hall for one day and a small budget to cover tea and coffee which will come out of existing resources.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

There are no implications relating to this report.”

Noted.

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Update on Delegation to Brussels

(Mrs. C. Sullivan, Business, Research and Development Officer, attended in connection with this item)

The Members were reminded that, at the meeting of Council on 3rd December, the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd November, under the heading "Visit to Brussels", was amended to provide that the visit take place to Brussels, as originally planned, but that it be postponed until the New Year.

The Business, Research and Development Officer informed the Members that, the visit took place on Tuesday 29th and Wednesday 30th January and the delegation consisted of the Lord Mayor, Councillors Walsh and Lyons, and two officers. She informed the Members that, during the course of the visit, the delegation had met with the following:

- Andrew Elliot, Head of Office, NI Executive Office in Brussels;
- Nina Obermaier, Adviser to Taskforce 50;
- Hermione Gough, Director for UK-EU Partnership at the UK's Permanent Representation to the European Union;
- Mr. Dieter Cavalleri Minister in charge of Parliamentary Affairs and Brexit at the Mission of Switzerland to the EU;
- Micheal Ó Conchuir, Secretary General European Alliance Group - European Committee of the Regions;
- David Brück & Amal Kaoua Deputy Directors Brexit Unit, Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU;
- The 3 Northern Ireland MEPs - Diane Dodds MEP, Martina Anderson MEP and Jim Nicholson MEP;
- Mairead McGuinness MEP, Vice President of the European Parliament and an Irish MEP from Midlands-North-West Constituency;
- Matt Carthy MEP, Irish MEP from Midlands-North-West Constituency;
- Gabriele Zimmer MEP who sits on the European Parliament's Brexit Steering Group;

She further advised that a meeting had been arranged with Mr. Elmar Brok, MEP and that, due to scheduling difficulties, it hadn't been possible to meet in Brussels. However, Mr. Brok had subsequently travelled to Belfast and had taken the opportunity to meet with the Lord Mayor.

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The Business, Research and Development Officer informed the Members of the key themes within all of the discussions that had taken place during the delegation, and highlighted that it had been important that views from all of the different perspectives with regard to Brexit, from Belfast and the wider region were presented and that ongoing engagement would be welcomed.

She further informed the Committee that the key points that came out of the meetings which had occurred during the delegation were:

- Cross border bodies will continue to operate and even under a ‘no deal’ scenario, Peace and Interreg funding has been agreed to the end of 2020;
- A case will have to be made in relation to accessing future EU funding programmes and this is likely to be based on what is available for third party countries – there are current examples of non-EU countries accessing funding programmes but this will be subject to UK government’s agreement to make the relevant levels of financial contributions to the relevant programmes;
- Whilst there is a desire for an orderly exit and the avoidance of a ‘no deal’ scenario, ‘no deal’ planning needs to be taking place – and has increased over recent weeks;
- Visits are important as they help inform both officials and MEPs in Brussels of what is happening on the ground – there was positive feedback about previous engagement with a range of political representatives and civic society in NI;
- Switzerland’s relationship with the EU has been ongoing for 40 years and is constantly evolving – although Switzerland was obviously never a member of the EU to begin with.

A Member indicated that he felt that the delegation to Brussels was a worthwhile visit and that the level of engagement and the broad spectrum of individuals who partook in meetings with the delegation demonstrated the success and value of the trip.

The Committee noted the update.

Update on Day 1 Preparedness

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to outline for Members work that is currently being undertaken in relation to the Council’s Brexit Day 1 preparedness.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the update.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Members are reminded that that the Committee was updated in November 2018 on the work that officers have recently undertaken in relational to identifying potential Day 1 service implications in relation to Brexit. An internal audit was undertaken and this identified that there are several key areas within Council where there may be a potential impact in the event of a no deal Brexit. These areas included:

- HR;
- finance/funding;
- procurement;
- waste;
- port health;
- product safety;
- communications; and
- business continuity management.

Further work is currently ongoing to define potential day 1 impacts, risks and possible mitigations and a business continuity approach is being taken to addressing potential Day 1 impacts. A cross departmental meeting was recently held with representatives from key services to identify key actions for moving forward. Members are asked to note that following on from this meeting the following actions are being undertaken:

- 1) That Council's critical services are completing Brexit Resilience Measures template to identify the potential impact that Brexit may have on service delivery over the 8-week period from 19 March to 10 May and the necessary resilience measures that need to be taken before 29 March.
- 2) That the responsible officers review and update their Business Continuity Plan ensuring that it deals with service delivery post Brexit, and communicates it to staff before 29 March.

Members should also note that from 19 March emergency planning staff will provide situational reporting and daily

position statements to the Council's senior management team on critical services. Arrangements exist across Northern Ireland to respond to emergencies and ensure that the support provided to the public is co-ordinated. In Belfast the agencies use the Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group to undertake planning to enable this response.

Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group members will meet before and after EU Exit to ensure all agencies can raise concerns if these arise. Normal emergency planning arrangements will be available to respond to emergencies if required. This may be as a result of a civil contingencies issue such as severe weather or if there is an EU Exit related issue which could cause a threat to life situation to arise or significant cumulative impacts have occurred which necessitate a locally co-ordinated response. The Emergency Co-ordination Centre in City Hall will be on standby to activate if required. Refresher training for staff who may be asked to work in the centre has commenced. The Council will establish an internal information hub from 19 March 2019 to maintain shared situational awareness across all departments/functions. This will include any potential business continuity issues, concerns which need escalated to central government or rising tide issues which could lead to an emergency activation being required.

Work has also been ongoing in several areas around preparations for Brexit including liaising with central government departments and working on civil contingency planning with other relevant partners. Central government departments are developing plans to prevent and mitigate any potential impacts of EU Exit. The Executive Office is leading this work across the NI Civil Service and is establishing co-ordination arrangements to ensure that any potential issues can be identified and addressed as quickly as possible. These arrangements will be established prior to EU Exit and continue until required but will be scaled up/down as needed. Co-ordination arrangements will still be required if there is a deal but at a reduced scale. Belfast City Council works with a wide range of departments to deliver normal services. The Council will link with the central government co-ordination arrangements to discuss and escalate any issues which arise in relation to EU Exit.

A further report updating Members on the preparations being made in relation to Day 1 preparedness will be brought to the Committee in March.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications relating to this report but the work that is being undertaken to further define potential day 1 impacts, risks and mitigations may have financial and resource implications and these will be reported to Members as required. It is likely that there will be direct costs associated with preparing for Brexit e.g. in relation to civil contingency planning, and where possible these will be claimed back from central government.

Members should note that the Council has not included an increase in its recurrent budgets because of the uncertainty, however, if one-off costs are to be incurred these will be financed through Council's general reserves

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no implications relating to this report.”

After discussion, during which a Member commended the report and the work that had been undertaken by the Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group, the Committee noted the contents of the report.

Update on Brexit Scenario Planning Workshop

The Commissioner for Resilience reminded the Committee that they had been invited to attend a Brexit Scenario Planning Workshop on 21st February. She advised the Members that it would be an informal 90 minute session on mapping out how Belfast City Council wanted to approach its medium term scenario planning and discussion on how the future relationship between the EU and the UK would be governed.

The Commissioner for Resilience informed the Members that the workshop would also examine the future funding relationship with the EU.

The Committee noted the update.

**Update on FSB Report – ‘Making Northern
Ireland an Enhanced Economic Zone’**

(Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development, attended in connection with this item)

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

To make the Committee aware of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) proposal for Northern Ireland to be

designated as an ‘enhanced economic zone’ in response to the ongoing Brexit negotiations.

This publication was prepared in October 2018 by the FSB NI, as part of their efforts to explore options in response to the Brexit process and to present an alternative scenario for the region.

2.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked:

- To note the content of the report;
- To consider inviting a representative from Federation of Small Businesses to a future Committee meeting.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) represents the small and medium sized enterprises (SME) that tends to dominate the Belfast and regional private sector. Belfast has 10,560 VAT registered businesses (14% of the regional total). Almost one fifth of these businesses are micro and small businesses, employing less than 50 employees.

During 2018, the FSB, working with Ulster University, held several focus groups in the region to provide a forum for business owners to express their views on Brexit. The key messages from the focus groups were in terms of a desire to minimise disruption and to take account of the region’s unique position to identify opportunities for the future.

Following this feedback, the FSB have produced a proposal that explores a future role for NI as an ‘enhanced economic zone’. This proposal is designed to enable tariff-free trade between both the UK and EU markets after Brexit; providing access to the UK market for Ireland and the rest of the EU and vice versa and regulatory assurance for goods entering the EU through NI.

The report acknowledges that it does not address all the challenges posed by Brexit and that compromises will be needed but it offers a pragmatic solution from the business community for consideration. A copy of the report is available on the FSB website at: [FSB proposal](#)

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The proposals are dependent on a number of assumptions. This includes a Withdrawal Agreement being in place that would include reference to the designation of NI as an Enhanced Economic Zone; that the UK/EU trade continues as-is at least until the end of the transition period in 2020; and the likely extension of the transition period to facilitate agreement on the future relationship.

The paper outlines a high level bespoke model for the region, examining the potential of NI to become an Enhanced Economic Zone post Brexit. Council officers have made contact with FSB for further detail. It is suggested that the Committee may wish to hear directly from FSB to further explore the proposal and specific considerations for Belfast.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications attached to this report.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues attached to this report.”

After discussion, the Committee noted the content of the report and agreed to invite a representative from the Federation of Small Businesses to the next meeting of the Brexit Committee.

Chairperson