

Brexit Committee

Thursday, 22nd August, 2019

MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);
Aldermen Haire and Rodgers; and
Councillors D. Baker, Brooks, Canavan,
Michael Collins, Flynn, Hutchinson, Magennis,
McAteer, McLaughlin, McKeown, Newton and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mr. N. Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. K. Walsh, Business, Research and Development
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st July.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Update on Day 1 Preparedness

(Mr. D. Neill, Emergency Co-Ordination Officer, and Mr. D. Connolly, City Protection Manager, attended the meeting in connection with this item.)

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided an overview of 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.

1.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note this update.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Members are reminded that that the previous Committee had been provided with regular updates on the work that is ongoing in relation to identifying potential Day 1 service implications in relation to Brexit. Members will be aware that there is ongoing uncertainty around the outcome and timings around the exit from the EU, therefore Officers are currently preparing for the possibility of a 'no deal' scenario on 31st October and any disruption that may or may not occur in the period leading up to and after it.

Work previously undertaken

Members are advised that in the period prior to the potential exit on the 29th March the following actions were undertaken:

- 1) The Council's critical services completed Brexit Resilience Measures templates to identify the potential impact that Brexit may have on service delivery over the six week period after exit from the EU and the necessary resilience measures that need to be taken before the exit date.
- 2) Responsible officers reviewed and updated their Business Continuity Plans ensuring that it deals with service delivery post Brexit, and have communicated it to relevant staff.

A process was also in place whereby emergency planning staff provided situational reporting and daily position statements to the Council's senior management team on critical services. A process for internal situational reporting was developed and critical services were asked to email the report to the Emergency Co-ordination Centre (ECC) each morning in order to allow Emergency Planning to collate the information and escalate any emerging issues. Collated information was then sent to the reporting points on a daily basis and where appropriate forwarded to Chief Officers, Heads of Services, Corporate Communications and Elected Members.

Members are advised that this process went live w/c 25th March and reporting took place for several days, however due to the change of the exit date from 29th March and uncertainty around the timings of the exit, it was decided by the NICS that daily reporting was not required at this point and that the frequency of reporting would be kept under review as the situation evolves. Members should note that this period of reporting was a good test of the reporting arrangements and

officers are confident that the process works and can be activated as required.

Planned activities

The Council's critical services are currently refreshing the Brexit Resilience Measures templates that they had previously completed to take account of the planned exit date of 31st October and to also consider normal 'winter pressures'. These templates will identify the potential impact that Brexit may have on service delivery over the six week period after exit from the EU and the necessary resilience measures that need to be taken before the exit date to ensure that the Council continues to deliver key services. Officers are currently scheduling an internal officer workshop for mid to end of September specifically with the purpose of updating / refreshing the templates, and considering wider implications based on the most up to date information we have.

Members should also note that emergency planning staff are working with partners and 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 be meeting 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. These are the same processes employed for any large unexpected event that may impact on the city and, as a result, are already tried and tested. 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 leads to a significant threat or significant cumulative impacts arising, 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 was undertaken in the period up to the previous exit date in March. The Council will establish an internal information hub in the period prior to the exit date and will maintain shared situational awareness across all Council 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. 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.

As Members are aware the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) have developed a risk register that consists of 16 main council level risks that need to be considered in light of Brexit. Each risk has an associated outline action plan for councils to consider in preparing for the risk. The risk register also deals with possible impacts post Day 1 and to the wider Council area and not just the organisation. Officers are currently working on updating the risk register and continue to participate in SOLACE's Brexit Task and Finish Group.

Food Safety and Port Health

Members are reminded that there are potential implications on food businesses and the Council's Food Safety and Port Health Regulatory functions. For example, Brexit may affect local food producers/exporters and importers. Consequently, the Council's Port Health Unit have been working closely with DEFRA, DAERA, the Food Standards Agency and local importers to develop and roll out a new UK IT system for the pre-notification of import of high risk food to replace the existing EU TRACES system which may no longer be available in the event of a no deal exit. We have also gathered and analysed data to estimate and prepare for additional checks that may be required for transited products (imported foods travelling through the EU destined for the UK).

In a no deal scenario every export consignment of animal origin destined for the EU may require certification to demonstrate it meets the necessary health requirements. Whilst this is primarily a DAERA responsibility, Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) may certify fish and eggs. There are currently ongoing discussions between

SOLACE and DAERA around the option of Councils undertaking this work and DAERA are considering how this work may be funded. We have been assisting DAERA by contacting businesses to establish their certification requirements and developing procedures to enable businesses to apply to Councils for certification where possible. We have been working closely with DAERA and the FSA to support the arrangement and delivery of workshops for potentially affected businesses. We have been taking the opportunity to signpost businesses to government advice and to support them to understand the potential changes and how to prepare for a no deal Brexit. Guidance for the food industry has been provided on the Council's website.

We are providing additional training for the Council's EHOs (both inland and at the Port) on the new IT systems and processes and to ensure we have sufficient trained officers to deliver the additional services required when the UK exits the EU.

Members are advised that Officers from Emergency Planning and Food Safety and Port Health Regulatory functions will be in attendance at this meeting to provide updates on the work that they are undertaking in relation to Brexit Day 1 Preparedness.

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 the relevant committees 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 potential requirements for additional staff 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 around Brexit, 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.

Appendices

None.”

He stated that the term ‘Day One Readiness’ referred to the six weeks leading up to the UK’s official withdrawal date from the European Union and the six weeks afterwards. He advised that emergency arrangements and mechanisms would be put in place from 14th October. He pointed out that the Northern Ireland Hub would be in operation from this date which would comprise representatives from all of the central civic contingency groups, with Local Government and multi-agency partners reporting into it.

He tabled draft Brexit Resilience Templates which included resilience measures to deal with immediate-term potential risks of the 15 critical services of the Council. The document illustrated what work had been undertaken across the Council to prepare for an emergency. He advised that an internal workshop would take place with staff of the critical services and a report, encompassing the updated templates, submitted to the Committee in October for consideration.

The Emergency Co-Ordination Officer provided an overview of the activation of the emergency plan and outlined the work which had been undertaken internally and externally to ensure Day One Readiness, such as testing and updating of the emergency plan. He indicated that the Service had been working closely with the Council’s critical services and successful internal and external practice exercises had taken place. He highlighted that the Business Continuity Services and the Emergency Plan continued to be reviewed and ready to activate in October and the Emergency Co-ordination Centre would remain on standby throughout the period.

The City Protection Manager summarised the work of the Food Safety and Port Health Regulatory functions and highlighted the contingency arrangements that had been put in place, such as additional staff training, checks and regulations, together with mapping and tracing exercises. He highlighted that, in the short term, the Government had agreed that there would be no additional checks in relation to imported food coming from the EU, but this might change over time due to regulatory divergence. He suggested that there could be an increase of up to 50 per cent in the food checks in which the service had to carry out.

He advised that, as the Council would no longer be able to rely on EU database in relation to imported food trace checks, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had designed a new system for the UK. He pointed out that as Food Safety and Port Health Regulatory changes would impact a range of businesses, the Council had planned a range of stakeholder events to ensure Day One Preparedness.

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to the potential for a backlog of lorries at the Ports caused by additional checks, the lack of communication from Government in relation to the potential of a ‘no deal’ Brexit and highlighted the importance of the Council’s Contingency Plans.

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The City Protection Manager confirmed that some wider customs issues were outside of the Council's remit and the internal contingency plans were based on the services which the Council provided.

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised that the Council would continue to engage with external bodies to ensure potential impacts on services would be mitigated.

During further discussion, Members raised the following concerns:

- The need for fortnightly Committee meetings to be kept up to date on the fast pace of change;
- Further engagement with various external bodies to keep well-informed of Brexit Readiness;
- The impact on the Council's financial reserve, revenue estimates and rates;
- The legal status of EU nationals, freedom of movement and the requirements of the EU settlement scheme;
- The importance and necessity to review the internal draft Brexit Resilience Templates;
- Access to the Shared Prosperity Fund;
- Impact on businesses, low income families, food, medical supplies, cyber security, energy and transport prices, animal welfare, and the internal BACS system,

After discussion, the Committee:

- I. noted the contents of the report and agreed to an additional meeting per month to prepare for contingency planning and Day One readiness and, accordingly, that the Brexit Committee would meet once a fortnight;
- II. agreed that an updated report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the legal status of EU nationals and the requirements of the EU settlement scheme;
- III. agreed that the Brexit Resilience Templates be sent to the Committee once the internal workshop had been undertaken and the draft updated;
- IV. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund;
- V. agreed that the following be invited to attend a future meeting:
 - Representatives from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, in relation to the potential shortage of medicines;
 - Representative of the Department for Infrastructure, Roads Service, in relation to Port contingency plans;

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- Update from the Director of Finance and Resources in relation to Brexit Readiness and effect on Revenue Estimates;
- Representative from the Executive Office and Head of the Civil Service in relation to Exports, Port Health and Decision Making Matters; and
- Representative from the Department for Communities, in relation to the impact on the unemployed and low income families.

Brexit Committee Workplan

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a draft workplan for their consideration. It is proposed that the draft workplan covers the period up to the exit date of 31st October and that it is revisited after this date when it is likely that the situation around EU exit will be clearer.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to agree the workplan as outlined in this report, subject to any additions or amendments Committee may request.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Members are reminded that at its meeting in June it requested that a draft workplan be submitted to this meeting for their consideration and that ‘in terms of the impact of Brexit upon Workers/Human Rights and on the environment, agreed that the following be invited to attend a future meeting:

- Representatives of Trades Unions
- Representatives of environmental organisations;
- Dr. Mary Dobbs – Queen’s University;
- Professor Colin Harvey – Queen’s University; and
- Dr. Daniel Holder – CAJ.

The Committee also agreed that the Local Government Auditor be invited to attend a future meeting in order to discuss the section within the Local Government Auditors Report 2019 referring to local government preparations for leaving the European Union.

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A request has also been made by the Chair to invite a representative from the Department of Economy to update the Committee on the recently published data paper on Northern Ireland's trade and investment under 'no deal' as part of the Northern Ireland Civil Service's work on EU Exit.

Members are also advised that Officers have met with representatives from the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels and that their Director, Andrew Elliott has offered to attend the Committee meeting in September to update Members on the programme of work that the Office is currently undertaking. Members are reminded that Andrew and his team were helpful in identifying people to meet and providing contact details during the organisation of the previous visit to Brussels.

Officers have now contacted the various people as outlined above to determine their availability to attend Committee and their responses are outlined in the table below. Subject to Committee agreeing the proposed speakers list, Officers will confirm these dates.

Brexit Committee	Attendees	Organisation
September	Prof. Colin Harvey and Daniel Holder, Deputy Director	QUB & CAJ
	Andrew Elliot, Director	NI Executive Office in Brussels
	Shane Murphy, Head of Analytical Services	Department for the Economy
October	Sean Kelly, Development Manager to co-ordinate forum leads	Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)
	Dr. Mary Dobbs	QUB
Has agreed to attend Committee but date not yet agreed	Owen Reidy, Assistant General Secretary	Northern Ireland Committee - ICTU
Awaiting a response	Pamela McCreedy, Chief Operating Officer and Local Government Auditor	NI Audit Office

Members are also advised that a request was sent to Party Group Leaders seeking any additional speakers they wished to add to the list and to date none have been received.

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In addition to the above speakers it is proposed that in the period up to 31st October, the following reports are brought to Committee for consideration:

Report Title	Areas covered	Committee date
Update on Day 1 preparedness	Council preparations to ensure business continuity for its critical services	Recommendation that this is a standing item
Update on legislative alignment	Report on the various European Directives and legislation governing the work of the Council	September
Update on eastern economic corridor	Report on the work that is ongoing in relation to the development of this	September
Update on medium term planning	The potential impact on the City of Brexit in the medium term and support that may be required	October
Update on EU Settlement Scheme – Information Sessions	Update on the holding of information sessions	October
Update on QUB research	Report on the work currently being undertaken by QUB in relation to future relations with the EU	TBD when the report becomes available

As Members will be aware information in relation to EU exit is continually becoming available. If any relevant information is released in the period up to the 31st October reports on this will be brought to Committee. Members may also have specific issues that they would like to request, through Committee, that a report be produced and these can be added to the workplan as required.

Given that there is ongoing uncertainty around the outcome and timings of the exit from the EU, it is proposed that the workplan is revisited after 31st October, when it is likely that

the situation around EU exit will be clearer and this is brought to the November Committee meeting for consideration.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no specific financial or resource implications relating to this report but there may be implications related to specific papers and these will be outlined in the relevant report.

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

There are no equality or good relations implications relating to this report.

Appendices

None.”

The Committee agreed to the Workplan as outlined in the report and that Members could send any further proposals for deputations to Democratic Services to be included for consideration at the next Committee.

Visit to Brussels for Open Week of Regions and Cities

(Ms. L. Leonard, European Manger, attended the meeting in connection with this item.)

The European Manager reminded the Committee that, in January, 2019 an All-Party delegation from the Council undertook a visit to Brussels to engage with EU officials. During the visit, members had met with a range of officials and politicians to discuss the different perspectives and views from Belfast and the wider region.

She highlighted that from 7th - 10th October, 2019 the European Week of Regions and Cities would be held in Brussels and suggested that this might be a suitable time for a further visit of the Brexit Committee. During this event, the Northern Ireland Office, in conjunction with other devolved administrations, would be holding an Open Week event. She advised that, although MEPs had no official duties during the EU Week of Regions and Cities, and might not be in attendance, elected members and officers of city and regional councils from across the EU, plus the EU Commission and Regional offices would be present. As such, the event provided an opportunity to network and see how other regions were managing Brexit, and to discuss future relationships and opportunities within Europe.

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Proposal

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the Committee agrees to an all-party deputation plus appropriate officers from the Council be appointed to visit Brussels in relation to the ongoing Brexit developments and noted that the upcoming European Week of Regions and Cities from 7-10th October has been identified as an appropriate time to attend, subject to a budget being approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

On a vote by show of hands nine Members voted for the proposal and two against and it was declared carried.

Update on EU Settlement Scheme Information Session

The Business, Research and Development Manager provided a brief overview of the EU Settlement Scheme to date. She advised that it would enable European Economic Area and Swiss citizens living in the UK, and their family members, to obtain the UK immigration status they would require to live, work and study in the UK after 30th June, 2021 (or after 31st December, 2020 if there was a no deal exit).

She highlighted that the Council had participated in Home Office teleconferences with Local Authorities across the UK to update them on the scheme and any relevant updates from these would be provided to Members. The last teleconference was held in July to provide an update on the number of applications that had been received and processed. She advised that statistics were only currently available at a regional level but Members would be notified, in the future, if they became available at Local Level.

She reported that, in Northern Ireland, the organisations which had received funding from the Home Office funding scheme were Advice NI and a consortium made up of the Law Centre and STEP Dungannon.

The Members were reminded that information sessions on the EU Settlement Scheme had been planned to take place in the City Hall, one for local organisations who had been granted funding from the Home Office scheme, and a follow up session to target potentially affected individuals.

Noted.

North South Collaboration Mapping Exercise Report

It was reported that on 20th June, the Committee on Exiting the European Union had published a UK Government document on North-South cooperation that had been prepared in September, 2017. The scoping exercise, that informed the document, had been undertaken by the UK Government, Northern Ireland Civil Service, European Commission and Government of Ireland. It focused on six areas: agriculture, environment, transport, health, tourism, and education. The purpose of the mapping exercise had been to chart the range of formal and informal cooperation that existed with a view to

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maintaining North-South cooperation following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

The City Solicitor advised that the document provided significant detail and outlined 142 areas of cooperation. For each of these areas, information had been provided as to the extent that they were underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement or existing EU legal and policy frameworks. Of the 142 areas, 54 were classified as directly linked, 42 as partially linked, and 46 as not linked.

He informed the Committee that Officers had reviewed the 142 areas of collaboration and identified the areas which were most relevant to the Council. That is, in terms of whether the collaborations directly referenced Belfast, or local government, or involved areas where the Council had statutory responsibilities.

He highlighted that further details were available in [appendix one](#) of the report and that the items that specifically mentioned Belfast included:

- 10 All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network; and
- 19 Cross-border Enterprise Rail Services.

Items listed that specifically mentioned councils (in general) and local government included:

- 51 Spatial Planning;
- 112 Cooperation beyond North/South Ministerial Council (local councils);
- 111 All-Island Local Authority Programmes; and
- 112 Local authority led cross-border engagements.

Other items listed with direct relevance to Council functions included:

- 3 Food Safety Promotion Boards;
- 30 Cooperation on checks on third country products of animal origin, including fish products and bivalve molluscs ;
- 8 Tourism;
- 1 Special EU Programmes Body;
- 43 PEACE IV programme; and
- 44 INTERREG funding.

He advised that officers would continue to monitor outputs from the Committee on Exiting the European Union in relation to cross-border collaborations affecting the Council and the results from the scoping exercise would also feed into Council's ongoing Day One Readiness work.

Noted.

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Additional Item – Letter to Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi

With the permission of the Chairperson, one Member raised an additional matter to acknowledge the points made recently by Chuck Schumer, U.S. Senate Democratic leader and Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives.

During discussion, a Member raised an objection to the letter and highlighted the importance of UK's potential trade deals with other countries.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

The Committee agrees to write to Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi acknowledging their recent public statements in relation to Brexit, specifically in regards to protecting the Good Friday Agreement and peace in Northern Ireland and avoiding a hard border.

On a vote by show of hands nine Members voted for the proposal and two against and it was declared carried.

Chairperson