

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 11th September 2025

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Natasha Brennan
Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Brian Smyth
Councillor Ciaran Beattie

Apologies: Alderman Sonia Copeland, Councillor Séamas de Faoite

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources
Godfrey McCartney, Good Relations Manager (for Item 1)
Jim Girvan Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Item 1)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Good Relations Strategy Refresh & 3 Year Action Plan

The Chief Executive welcomed Peter Osborne who presented to Members on the refresh of the Good Relations Strategy and Action plan along with an update on the current status of the audit being undertaken. He outlined the process to date, the approach being considered and the feedback received following engagement sessions with stakeholders. It was highlighted to Members that engagement is still underway and therefore the emerging findings presented were purely indicative at this stage and that the strategy will be further refined and updated as this work progresses. Discussion followed on the proposed outcome based framework for the strategy and the links to the Belfast Agenda and the recent Segregation and the Environment research report were highlighted. Members noted the proposed timeline and the format for engagement with Members and it was agreed that the dates discussed would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance outlined the approach for the upcoming Member workshop to explore existing and new priorities for the setting of the 2026/27 District Rate. Members

discussed the proposed approach for the day and noted that the workshop will provide a forum for Members to consider the uncontrollable costs, funding requests already agreed by Committee and growth proposals coming forward. It would also provide an opportunity to identify any potential budgetary gaps in a timely manner and to help ensure that growth proposals submitted for 2026/27 are aligned to the Corporate Planning process.

3. 2 Royal Avenue

The Director of City Regeneration & Development provided a briefing on the engagement that had taken place following the Expression of Interest/soft market testing exercise undertaken in respect of the future use of the ground floor of 2 Royal Avenue. Members discussed considerations around the longer term future use options for the ground floor and the interdependencies associated with the usage of the first floor in line with associated funding conditions. A report will be brought to a future SP&R Committee outlining the proposals discussed for Members consideration.

4. Draft Irish Language Policy

The City Solicitor provided an update on the draft Irish Language Policy following consideration at August SP&R Committee and outlined the work that had taken place since. She presented some initial options for consideration for how the Belfast City Council roundel could be adapted in line with the draft policy. Discussion ensued and Members noted the detail that will be included in the report to September SP&R Committee, specifically in relation to the revisions to the draft policy outlined.

Members noted that August SP&R Committee had agreed to invite the relevant stakeholders to the September meeting. Following discussion there was consensus that this item remains on the current agenda for the 19 September rather than arranging a special meeting and if required a comfort break will be organised on the day via the Chair.

5. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications that will be considered at the September Planning Committee. A Member raised a query in relation to the closure of Connswater and the current application linked to the Strategic Site Assessments in that area and the Director of City Regeneration & Development to follow up.

6. Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illuminate requests received. Members noted the following requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **Belfast Trojans** - American Football 2025 National Championship winners of the Shamrock Bowl XXXVII– 2 October 2025
- **10th Anniversary of Pink Run** - 10 October 2025
- **National Day of Spain** –12 October 2025
- **World Pancreatic Cancer Day**- 6 November

7. AOB

Mock Committees

The Director of Human resources outlined a proposed approach in order to assist officers to develop their skills in delivering reports to Members via mock committees. She advised that mock committees had previously been undertaken for officers participating in a women's mentoring programme and the feedback gained had been very positive at that time. The Director to forward the detail on the proposals discussed to Members and Member nominations will be sought in order to progress this programme of work. The same approach will be undertaken for CMT and consideration to be given to similar approach for Area Working Groups.

Assets Management Update

The Director of Property & Projects outlined some of the recommendations that will be included in the Asset Management report to September SP&R Committee specifically in relation to the Gasworks Site, North Foreshore and the former Grove swimming baths site. She outlined the proposals in relation to each of these sites and it was noted that further information in relation to the Gasworks site would be circulated to Party Group Leaders for consideration and review.

The Director of Property & Projects also referred to a decision previously agreed by SP&R Committee in relation to the relocation of the knotted gun statue which was gifted to the City of Belfast from Stena Line and is currently sited at Girdwood. She advised that since then further exploratory work had taken place and outlined the new site proposal that has since been identified for which there was general consensus.

Request to present

The Chief Executive referred to the request for a GLL Trade Union deputation to present to Party Group Leaders following agreement at September Council meeting. Members agreed to the deputation attending the Party Group Leaders meeting scheduled on 25 September 2025.