

# **Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum**

## **Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025**

### **Attendance**

Members:

Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Natasha Brennan  
Councillor Sarah Bunting  
Councillor Brian Smyth  
Councillor Ciaran Beattie  
Alderman Sonia Copeland  
Councillor Séamas de Faoite

### **Officers:**

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance  
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services  
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects  
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development  
John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy  
Wendy Langham, Programme Director, Belfast Stories (for Item 2)  
Eimear Henry, Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories (for Item 2)  
Martin Doherty, Contracts Manager, Belfast Stories (for Item 2)  
Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty (for Item 3)  
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### **1. Draft Belfast City Airport Masterplan**

The Chief Executive welcomed a deputation from Belfast City Airport which included Matthew Hall, Tim Halley and Michelle Hatfield along with Chris Brown from Brown O' Connor. Members received a presentation on the Belfast City Airport draft Master Plan 2040, which was opened for public consultation on 16 September at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. The deputation outlined the vision for growth over the next 15 years and the detail of the ambitions to improve connectivity and drive economic growth for the city and the region that is included within the draft masterplan. Members discussed the proposed physical and operational changes, passenger forecasts and the potential impact these changes may have in terms of meeting the path to Net Zero, for which clarity was provided. Members also noted the social impact work currently undertaken by the airport and the potential to further support local communities once the master plan is finalised.

The deputation outlined the consultation timeframe and advised that engagement had taken place with communities in South Belfast, East Belfast and North Down. Following the consultation process it is envisaged the final masterplan would be published in early 2026.

It was noted that parties would consider and submit individual party responses to the consultation and that a corporate response would be drafted to cover the areas of Local Development Plan, Environment and Economy.

## **2. Belfast Stories**

The Programme Director and Strategic Lead for Belfast Stories provided a detailed update for Members on the progress achieved to date in relation to the completion of RIBA Design stage 2 and outlined the key programme milestones in RIBA stage 3. The Director outlined the recommendations that would be included in a detailed programme update report to October SP&R which will include the development of an Inclusive Growth Plan, the submission of the planning application and the request to hold Party Group Briefings. The Strategic Lead presented some illustrative concept design visuals and outlined the detail of the proposed stories development programme. There were some issues raised by Members in relation to the stories development programme presented, the Programme Director and Strategic Lead to reflect on the points raised and follow up in advance of SP&R.

Members also noted that the report will include a recommendation for an in principle agreement for additional capital costs subject to legal agreements, the detail of which was noted. An addendum to the Belfast Stories Outline Business Case will be required if approved by SP&R Committee and Members will be kept updated as this work progresses.

## **3. Supporting Area-based Community Planning and Community Wealth Building**

The Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty presented for Members a proposed approach to bring forward an area-based approach to community planning across the city which is a key action within the refreshed Belfast Agenda. He referred to the monies set aside as part of the 2025/2026 rates setting process to support this work and outlined the proposal that the funding be allocated on the basis of two interrelated programmes. Members noted the proposed purpose, principles and funding allocation model for the two programmes along with the proposed governance arrangements. Following discussion some issues and points were raised in relation to the proposals presented including governance and decision making arrangements linked to Council and the Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty agreed this would be reflected in the report to be submitted to October SP&R Committee for consideration.

It was also noted that Officers engage with the relevant Government Departments in relation to recent funding announcements made for pilot community led development initiatives.

#### **4. Finance Update**

The Director of Finance provided a summary of the Medium Term Financial Plan and outlined the work that has been undertaken to date and advised that Departmental estimates and growth proposals have now been submitted for further consideration with efficiencies to follow imminently. A report will be brought to October SP&R outlining the work to date and a high level overview of the proposals that have been submitted. Members also noted that the next Member workshop to explore priorities for the setting of the 2026/27 District Rate aligned to the Corporate Planning process is scheduled for November. Further detail of The growth proposals and efficiencies submitted, following the Director challenge meetings will also be on the agenda for discussion at this workshop.

The Director also provided an update on the tenders for the provision of agency resources which was deferred at September SP&R Committee. He briefed Members on the engagement that had taken place and the actions that had been agreed with Directors which would be incorporated into the report to October SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

#### **5. North Foreshore – Giant’s Park Belfast Limited**

The Director of Property & Projects updated Members on the Master Development Agreement with Giant’s Park Belfast Limited. The Director outlined the original proposals and presented a number of revised proposals to the masterplan at the North Foreshore along with the rationale for the revisions. She outlined that these revisions were allowed for within the scope of the Master Development Agreement. Members noted the significant social and economic benefits as a consequence of the revised proposals and the key next steps. The detail discussed will be included in a report to October SP&R Committee.

#### **6. Planning Update**

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications that were considered at the October Planning Committee.

## **7. AOB**

### **Governance**

The City Solicitor briefed Members on Counsel opinion that had been sought and the background to the request for this opinion. A report will be brought to October SP&R Committee for consideration, and it was noted that the report is published in a timely manner to allow Members to further consider.

### **Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge Competition**

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge bid development which is focused on re-imagining the city's alley-ways, ahead of the application deadline on 17 October 2025. Members noted the deadline for submission and that retrospective approval would be sought from November SP&R Committee.

The Chief Executive advised that James Anderson, Bloomberg's Head of Local Government Innovation had recently visited the city and had provided some useful reflections following his visit.

### **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.

- **80th Anniversary of the Founding of the United Nations** – 24<sup>th</sup> October 2025
- **Project Pink Walk** – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2025

### **Electric Vehicle Charging Point Network Project**

The Director of Property & Projects advised that extensive work had been undertaken to date on potential sites within the Council's estate where electric vehicle charging stations could be installed. The Area Working Groups have been briefed on this programme of work, and it was noted that a report would now be brought to October SP&R Committee outlining the next steps.

### **Irish landmark Trust**

The Director of Property & Projects provided a briefing on the Irish Landmark Trust, an all-island charity working to save and sustain unique built heritage into holiday accommodation. Members agreed to the Director engaging with the charity in relation to exploring funding for vacant council owned heritage assets. The Director agreed to forward further information to Members following the meeting and updated will be provided as this work progresses.

### **Freedom of the City**

The Chief Executive referred to a previous request for Freedom of the City which a Member had asked was raised again with the Forum. It was noted that the process for considering Freedom of the City requests and alternative options on how citizens could be recognised by the council was ongoing.

### **Special Party Group Leaders's Meeting**

Members noted that a special PGL's meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 22 October at 2.00pm, meeting invite to follow.