

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 14th May 2026

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Brian Smyth
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Natasha Brennan

Apologies: Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officer:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Nora Largery, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Ulster Orchestra

The Chief Executive welcomed Auveen Sands, Chief Executive and colleagues from the Ulster Orchestra. Members were presented with an overview of the transformative journey the Ulster Orchestra has taken in recent years which included the acquisition of Townsend Street Church as its new home. The deputation outlined the extensive restoration and redevelopment work undertaken to date and the future development proposals for the site on a longer term basis. Members noted the Orchestra's vision, strategic objectives, outreach work and the significant community and engagement programme of work with key stakeholders in the city to embed music in local communities. Alignment with the Belfast Agenda and other key strategies was highlighted and potential links to the Bolder Vision for Belfast was noted. Members thanked Auveen and colleagues for attending and for the excellent outreach work being undertaken by the Orchestra in local communities. It was agreed that a copy of the presentation would be shared with PGL's following the meeting.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance updated on the current financial position of the Council, Members noted the update provided and that a detailed year end finance report would be brought to June SP&R Committee.

The Director also provided an update on the discretionary funding reserve and arising from the discussion it was agreed that a review of the fund going forward was required, with the Director to engage with individual parties in order to ascertain the desired criteria and approach for the fund. Members also raised some queries in relation to specified reserves set aside in previous years and it was noted that the detail of these would be included in the year end finance report along with an update on how these could potentially be progressed within agreed timeframes.

The Director also outlined a high-level overview of requests emerging from P&C and CG&R Committees that had been referred to SP&R Committee, the detail of which will be brought to May SP&R Committee for Members consideration. Members asked that the long term funding options for these requests is taken into consideration going forward. A Member requested that a summary economic impact/benefits report for the events discussed was brought to a future meeting.

It was noted a further Transformation and Efficiency Workshop will be held in June date to follow.

3. Events Space

The Director of Property and Projects referred to the ongoing work to identify and assess suitable event sites as previously discussed by the Forum following decision to restore playing pitch provision at the Boucher Road Playing Fields site. It was noted that engagement is still underway with key stakeholders and therefore Members agreed that the Director continues with these discussions to further explore. The relevant stakeholders to then be invited to the next Party Group Leaders meeting on 28 May to discuss emerging concept plans. A report will then be brought to June SP&R Committee for consideration.

The Director also provided a briefing on access arrangements for the events scheduled for this year at the Boucher Road Playing Fields site which was noted by Members.

4. City Hall Stained Glass Window – Health Service

The Director of Property and Projects provided an update on the design, manufacture and timeline for the installation of the new stained glass window in City Hall in recognition of the Health Service in Belfast. Members noted the draft design presented which had been considered by the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Working Group this month. Following discussion

the Director to consider the feedback provided and subsequently Members agreed on the design in principle, subject to minor amends should they arise following the further engagement taking place as outlined. It was noted that the final design will then be considered by SP&R Committee in June.

5. Governance Review

The City Solicitor outlined the programme of work that has been undertaken in relation to the Governance Review. Members noted the proposals and next steps as outlined which will be included in a report to May SP&R Committee. Members will be asked to further consider and review the proposals with a detailed report to then be brought back to June SP&R Committee. The City Solicitor to consider Party Group Briefings in tandem where parties require. A Member raised a query in relation to the Standards and Business Committee and the City Solicitor to further consider in the context of the review. Arising from the discussion it was noted that an update on the terms and conditions for the booking of rooms in community centres would be brought to the next Party Group Leaders meeting.

6. Funding - Area Based Community Planning

The Chief Executive outlined the details of a potential funding opportunity for the area based community planning programme of work. It was noted that Members were in consensus that Officers further explore with the Department of Foreign Affairs and an update brought back to Party Group Leaders as discussions progress.

The Director of Property & Projects and the Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty also outlined the timelines and next steps for the Local Community Ownership Fund and the area-based community planning programme funding allocation agreed by Council.

7. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy presented a summary update in relation to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann work programme and outlined the work underway across a number of core workstreams including an update on the highlights from the main programme and fringe programme. The Director also provided an update in relation to the engagement programme to ensure participation and communication with key stakeholders across the city. The Director noted the points raised by Members and to follow up accordingly. A report on the detail discussed will be brought to May SP&R Committee.

8. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on a number of planning matters which were currently live. In relation to a specific query raised by a Member the City Solicitor to follow up with the Member in due course.

9. Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received. Members noted the following request would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **International Overdose Awareness Day – 31 August 2026**

10. AOB

Sporting Event Opportunity

The Chief Executive provided a briefing on a request he had received to explore the potential to host a sporting event in Belfast. The Chief Executive outlined the detail of the event, the opportunity that had arisen and the outcome following initial discussions. Members discussed the potential financial implications involved and the benefits arising from hosting the event in the city. It was noted that further due diligence and exploration would be undertaken by Officers with an update to be brought back to the Forum in due course.

Members also noted a potential further co-hosting sporting event opportunity in 2031 and again there was consensus for Officers to further explore.

A Member raised a query in relation to a previous proposal that was presented to Party Group Leaders for which the Chief Executive provided clarity.

Proposal to host Large Scale Event

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy provided an update on a request previously discussed at the Forum to be a host city and partner in a large scale event in Belfast in 2028 and potentially 2030. The Director referred to the previous discussion held with Members and provided an update following Officers consideration in relation to budgetary constraints, strategic alignment, resource requirements and market considerations given existing

obligations. Following discussion, it was noted a report will be brought to a future SP&R Committee.

Meeting Request

The Chief Executive sought the view of Members in relation to a request from Cathedral Quarter BID to present to Party Group Leaders. It was agreed that representatives be invited to a special meeting of Party Group Leaders to which key statutory stakeholders would also be invited.

Chief Executive Appraisal

Members were asked to note that correspondence will be issued seeking nominations for the Chief Executive appraisal panel.

Issues Raised by Members

It was noted that:

- A meeting with the organisers of an upcoming event in the city would be arranged in relation to the issue raised.
- Officers to follow up on the matters raised by Members in relation to Ormeau Park and Belsonic.
- Officers to provide an update on Christmas Market 2026.