

Brexit Committee

Thursday, 15th April, 2021

MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson); and
Alderman Sandford; and
Councillors Baker, Brooks, Canavan,
Ferguson, Gormley, Hanvey, Kyle, Long, McLaughlin,
McMullan, Newton, Spratt and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Ms. K. Walsh, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Mrs. C Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Councillor de Faoite.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th March 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 April.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brooks declared an interest in respect of item 3 – Port Health Unit Verbal Update, on the basis that he was employed by Gordon Lyons MLA, who at the time of the previous Brexit Committee meeting, had temporarily taken up the post of DAERA Minister, given Minister Poots' treatment for his illness, and he left the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

Presentation

PSNI - Supt. G. Pollock and Supt. A. Davidson

The Chairperson welcomed Superintendent Pollock and Superintendent Davidson from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to the meeting.

Superintendent Davidson stated that he had been working for the PSNI EU Exit Team which had overall responsibility for preparedness and managing the operations of the organisation following the exit from the European Union.

He reported that, from a policing and law enforcement perspective, EU exit planning was complex and the focus had been to prepare the organisation for a new operating environment, which included understanding and responding to any changes the EU exit would bring, such as perforation and impact on police powers, policy and procedural impacts and operational response.

He pointed out to the Committee that, as a result of the trade and cooperation agreement, the PSNI would continue to work with other law enforcement agencies across EU member states and would maintain access to a range of law enforcement structures and databases, such as Europol.

He highlighted areas of potential criminality arising from opportunities or vulnerabilities the EU exit presented, such as smuggling, fraud, cyber related crime and the movement of illicit goods through potential new transportation routes and new compliance and regulatory practices. He added that it was too early to identify any patterns or trends within criminality and that the PSNI had increased its collaboration with a range of agencies and were utilising existing structures.

He reported that part of the PSNI's response had been the successful funding and allocation of staff and officers associated with EU exit, with 308 additional officers and staff as a result, the majority of whom were in local neighbourhood policing.

Superintendent Pollock reported that the key issue was that normal policing continued throughout the period of transition and that the additional officers would be able to deliver increased neighbourhood policing in Belfast, supplementing the service.

He stated that the PSNI's key operating principle was that, if you were a victim of crime, your case or investigation would not be hindered by the EU exit.

Following further discussion, the Committee thanked Superintendent Pollock and Superintendent Davidson for their representation and they retired from the meeting.

NI Protocol/Trade and Cooperation Agreement - Verbal Update

The Director of Economic Development reported that he had attended a meeting, which had been facilitated by Invest NI, with regard to free ports to explore possible opportunities stemming from the NI Protocol for foreign direct investment.

He advised the Members that he had sought further clarity and was unaware of any work having being commissioned. He reported that officers would present a report to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the Council's endorsement of free ports, the Director of Economic Development stated that Belfast City Council had

not established or sought a position with regard to free ports and he added that HM Treasury had released a prospectus for competition to become a free port and, as far as he was aware, there had been no submission from any Northern Irish local authority.

The Committee noted the update.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the discussion and presentation associated with the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Port Health Unit - Verbal Update

The City Solicitor and Director of City Services presented the Committee with an update on the Port Health Unit.

The Committee noted the update.

Chairperson