

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 4th December, 2019

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Kingston; and
Councillors S. Baker, Beattie, Brooks, Ferguson,
Flynn, Garrett, Graham, T. Kelly, McAllister, McLaughlin
and Murphy.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. S. Dolan, Acting Director of City Regeneration
and Development; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Chairing of Meeting

In the absence of the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson, the Committee agreed that Councillor Flynn chair the meeting.

(Councillor Flynn in the Chair.)

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of the Chairperson (Councillor Hargey), the Deputy Chairperson (Councillor Howard), Alderman Spence and Councillor O'Hara.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 6th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd December.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Presentation

Tourism NI

The Committee was informed that Mr. J. McGrillen, Chief Executive, Tourism NI, was in attendance in order to provide an overview of the work of Tourism NI and he was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. McGrillen reviewed the roles of Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI and Visit Belfast and explained that Tourism NI was responsible for promoting Northern Ireland as a destination to tourists from within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It was

responsible also for the statutory certification of all tourism accommodation provision in Northern Ireland, the funding of major events and supporting investment in the development of visitor attractions and experiences.

He reported that, between 1998 and 2018, the number of out-of-state visitors to Northern Ireland had increased by 90% and, significantly, tourism spend had risen by 208%. He highlighted the importance of Belfast to the local tourism sector and drew the Members' attention to the fact that, in 2018, it had accounted for 41% of all tourism spend in Northern Ireland. He compared tourism figures for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and pointed out that, based upon current performance, Tourism NI was optimistic that the previously agreed target of delivering £1bn of tourism spend in Northern Ireland by 2020 could be achieved within the current calendar year and that there was the potential to double that spend by 2030. The Department for the Economy was in the process of finalising a strategic document to be issued for consultation early in 2020, which it was anticipated would endorse that target. He outlined the work which would be required to achieve that objective and stressed that it had the potential to create 25,000 new jobs within the tourism sector over the next decade, including 12,000 in Belfast.

Mr. McGrillen then outlined the extent of Tourism NI's work in promoting Belfast to the travel trade and highlighted, in particular, the hosting in 2018 of the Hosts Global Forum and in 2020 of Visit Britain's Explore GB and Northern Ireland travel trade event, as well as a number of 'Meet the Buyer' tourism networking events. He provided details of Tourism NI's capital funding expenditure in recent years and pointed to the fact that it provided £1.6 million annually to support events across Northern Ireland, as well as allocating £200k to a subvention fund to attract conferences to Belfast and £300k to Visit Belfast to assist in promoting the City overseas.

He informed the Committee that 2019 had seen the launch of the innovative "Embrace a Giant Spirit" branding initiative and outlined how it would be utilised by Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to promote Northern Ireland on the island of Ireland and internationally, with the aim of increasing visitor numbers and ensuring economic impact across all regions. He then drew the Committee's attention to the outcome of a detailed survey which had been undertaken in 2018 of approximately 3,000 visitors to Northern Ireland, which for Belfast had been largely positive, in terms of strengths and areas for improvement. He concluded by highlighting both the challenges being faced currently by the tourism sector around Brexit, funding, skills availability and international connectivity and the opportunities to work collaboratively on events programming, the Belfast Region City Deal/Belfast Story and neighbourhood tourism.

Mr. McGrillen then addressed a number of issues which had been raised by the Members and was thanked by the Chairperson for his presentation.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Belfast Zoo – Update on Performance

(Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted for the Committee's consideration a report on the performance of the Zoo for the second quarter of 2019/20, under five key areas, namely, Animal Collection/Welfare, Education Services, Financial Performance, Marketing and Events and Visitor Services. The report had confirmed that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency had renewed the Zoo's operating licence for a further three years, with no conditions attached, and had provided an update on the implementation of the high priority recommendations arising from the independent reviews in 2018 of animal welfare and security.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided, congratulated staff on the renewal of the licence and agreed that the next quarterly report should include details of the Zoo's planned annual programme of events and of visitor footfall trends for the past three years.

Requests to Present

Purple Flag Accreditation

The Committee agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation on Belfast's bid for Purple Flag night time economy accreditation.

Markets Development Action Plan

The Committee agreed to receive at its next monthly meeting a presentation on the Development Plan for St. George's Market and that it should make reference to the Sunday market offering for cruise ship visitors and the potential for increasing the frequency of the Twilight Market.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Site Visit – Merchant Square

The Committee agreed, at the request of the developer, to undertake a site visit to the Merchant Square Development in Wellington Place.

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Finance, Procurement and Performance

Financial Reporting 2019/20

The Committee considered a report which set out the financial position of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for the second quarter of 2019/20. The report confirmed that there had, during that period, been an underspend of £74,000 (0.8%), with a year-end overspend of £326,000 (1.9%) being forecast. The underspend could be attributed primarily to vacant posts across a number of services, which had been offset by lower than budgeted income and to additional health and safety expenditure.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairperson