

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

Thursday 12th January, 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Ronan McLaughlin (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)

Councillor Michael Long

Councillor Billy Hutchinson

Councillor Sarah Bunting (*for Alderman George Dorrian*)

Councillor Donal Lyons

Alderman Jim Rodgers (*for Alderman Sonia Copeland*)

Councillor Fiona Ferguson

Councillor Mal O'Hara

Apologies: Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Alderman George Dorrian, Alderman Sonia Copeland, Nora Largey.

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive

Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)

John Tully Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 2)

Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 2 & 5)

Cathy Matthews Director, Resources and Fleet (for Item 5)

1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance presented a summary of the current position for the 2023/24 revenue estimates and outlined the next steps in the rate setting process. The Director outlined the feedback received following recent Party Group Briefings. Members discussed the options being considered and noted that further information on the options outlined was required following the briefings and this was currently being collated. In light of the request for further information in order to inform decision making the special SP and R Committee which had been holding for Friday 13 January would be cancelled to allow for the collation of this information. A detailed report will be brought to the standing SP and R Committee on 20 January for Members' consideration. If required, a special PGL's meeting will be arranged in advance.

Members also noted the proposed timeline in relation to agreeing the cash limits for Committees and the level of the District Rate to be set for 2023/24. The Director reminded Members that the setting of the District Rate is a decision which must be made at a meeting of Council and legally this decision must be made by 15 February 2023.

2. Pay and Grading Review

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy updated the Forum on the progress being made on the Pay and Grading review proposals. The Chief Executive outlined for Members the detail of the proposals put forward and advised that given the subsequent impact on the district rate a further meeting with the Trade Union Group had been organised week commencing 16 January in advance of January SP and R Committee. An update on this will be communicated to Party Group Leaders and included in the Revenue Estimates and District Rate report to January SP and R Committee.

3. Governance Review Update

The Chief Executive advised that as raised previously by a Member at a joint meeting of PGLs/CMT that a review would be undertaken of the current governance arrangements which will also consider the current number of Committees, boards and working groups. He outlined for Members the proposed timeline. Members discussed some of the potential issues which may be considered as part of the review and noted that there would be ongoing engagement with Members and Officers in the coming months in order to identify issues and to inform the terms of reference for the review. The Chief Executive also advised that a review of CMT would be carried out separately alongside this process. In relation to a query raised by a Member, it was noted that, whilst the review of CMT would be carried out separately, the outcome of that review would be considered within the overall review of the governance arrangements for the Council.

4. Planning Update

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in the coming months.

5. AOB

Waste Collection – Missed Bins

Councillor O'Hara had raised an issue in relation to missed bin issues over the Christmas period. The Chief Executive and the Director, Resources and Fleet firstly apologised to Members for the situation that had arisen over the Christmas period in waste collection. The Director, Resources and Fleet then advised that this situation had arisen due to a number of factors within the service. Members noted these factors and the measures being taken to ensure collections returned to normal routines which were also discussed at both January Council and P and C Committee. Following discussion at January Council, it was agreed that a Cleansing Task Force would be re-established. There was a number of issues and concerns raised by Members in relation to routes/recruitment/working practices and retention of staff within waste collection and detailed discussion on each followed. There was also detailed discussion on areas that could be targeted for improvement. It was specially highlighted that communication with Members was imperative in a timely manner in order to consider potential resolutions in the future. It was agreed that, going forward, an update on waste collection arrangements for the Christmas holiday period would be brought to Committee for consideration from October onwards. It was also agreed that a report on the issues raised by Members would be brought to the Forum in advance of consideration at P and C Committee once the required information had been collated.

In relation to a point raised by a Member, the Chief Executive to liaise with the Director of External Affairs, Communications and Marketing to consider a media release for issue.

Pilot Workstyles Policy

The Director of Human Resources provided an update on the development of a Workstyles Policy which will be implemented on a pilot basis for 18 months from 1 April 2023. The policy will also be reviewed on a six-monthly basis throughout the pilot period. She advised that the policy had been developed by the Return to the Office working group (RTO) which is made up of management and trade union representatives and was approved by JNCC in December. This followed extensive benchmarking and evolving best practice and a report which will include the detail discussed will be brought to January SP and R Committee for consideration.