

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

Thursday 9th February 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Ronan McLaughlin (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)

Councillor Michael Long

Councillor Billy Hutchinson

Alderman George Dorrian

Councillor Donal Lyons

Alderman Sonia Copeland

Councillor Mal O'Hara

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson, Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, Councillor Ciaran Beattie

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive

Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)

John Greer, Director of Economic Development (for Item 2)

Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy (for Item 2)

Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 3 & 6)

David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 5 & 6)

Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 6)

Cathy Matthews Director, Resources and Fleet (for Item 6)

1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance presented the Quarter 3 financial position for 2022-23 which would be presented to members at the February SP&R Committee. He outlined for Members the forecasted underspend for year end and noted that no reallocations would be considered until the year end position is presented to SP&R Committee in June 2023. He advised that Members would be kept updated on any proposed reallocations as they progress.

2. Entrepreneurship Support Service

The Director of Economic Development and the Senior Manager Economy provided an update for Members on the new model for business start-up and growth support which Party Group Leaders had previously been briefed on. The Director outlined for Members the proposed procurement strategy in relation to the programme and Members discussed some of the challenges and risks involved with some of the options previously suggested. He

advised that Legal counsel was being sought in advance of February SP&R Committee. A report on the detail discussed and an update on the legal counsel will be included in the report to February SP&R Committee.

3. Planning Update

The City Solicitor 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.

4. Local Government Conference – 23 February 2023

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members on the upcoming conference hosted by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), which is to be hosted in Omagh on 23rd February 2023. Attendance at the conference for those Members appointed by the Council to NILGA was agreed at December SP&R Committee. Party Group Leaders noted the date and agreed to follow up with those Members appointed or their nominees in relation to attendance.

5. DfC Hardship Fund 2022/2023 – Correspondence

The Director of Neighbourhood Services updated the Forum on recent correspondence received by the Chief Executive from the Department of Communities (DfC) in relation to potential central government funding for a hardship scheme. Members noted that at this stage DfC was seeking feedback from each of the 11 Councils to ascertain if they would be able to put a scheme in place and if so, how they would potentially distribute the proposed funding. The Director stressed that the amount to be allocated to Belfast and the timescales involved in distributing the funding was still to be finalised by DfC. He sought the views of Members on how this potential funding might be administered including alternative options to the recent fuel poverty funds and outlined for Members some options around food poverty. There was a general consensus that given the recent support provided to households for fuel poverty that food poverty may be a more appropriate option, other options were also highlighted by Members. Members also discussed the recent challenges with the administration of the Emergency Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund and agreed that there was a number of existing food poverty delivery models that could potentially distribute the funding, the Director to follow up on capacity of these delivery model options. Further clarity will be

sought from DfC on the allocation for Belfast and further defined delivery timescales and a report will be brought to February SP&R for Members consideration.

6. AOB

Waste Collection – Public Holiday Arrangements – St Patrick’s Day 2023

The Director, Resources and Fleet provided an update for Members on the arrangements being put in place to ensure adequate staffing resources for bin collections for the upcoming next public holiday St Patrick’s Day (Friday 17 March 2023). She outlined the process to date and advised that a further update would be provided for Party Group Leaders week commencing 20 February 2023. In relation to a query raised by a member about subsequent bank holidays the Director of Human Resources advised that this process would commence following the next JNCC meeting in February. The Chief Executive advised that a report will then be presented to March P&C Committee outlining the arrangements to be put in place for the Easter and May bank holidays and members noted a review of arrangements will take place in the Spring.

Request for use of Council Premises

The Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined for Members a proposal to provide the use of a council owned community centre for a local community association due to recent circumstances that had arisen that resulted in the association having no premises at present. He advised that the community centre is currently used for storage purposes only and this can be accommodated elsewhere. A report will be brought to February SP&R Committee for consideration.

Disability Working Group Members

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members on attendance at the Elected Member Disability Working Group which was recently established. The City Solicitor to consider the possibility of an alternative time for the scheduled meetings and Party Group Leaders to follow up within their individual parties in relation to nominations/attendance.

Amalgamation of Fortnightly Payroll

The Director of Human Resources provided a briefing for Members on the consultation process which had concluded in December 2022 with Trade Unions in relation to amalgamating fortnightly payrolls. She outlined the legal advice received on the amalgamation process and the mitigations offered to assist staff who are being impacted as a result of the amalgamation. Members noted that both the Director of Human Resources along with the Director of Finance would meet with those staff affected by the amalgamation.

Illumination Request

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a request received from the Turkish Association of Northern Ireland to illuminate City Hall in light of the recent earthquake. A Member requested that it would also be illuminated for Syria. Both Illuminations were agreed to share our thoughts with people effected in Turkish and Syria earthquake. It was agreed both illuminations would take place on consecutive days as soon as there were available dates in February. it was noted that these requests would be agreed under the City Solicitor's delegated authority.

Waste Update

Councillor Long raised an issue in relation to the problematic parking of vehicles impacting waste collection routes and enforcement issues. The Director Resources and Fleet advised that a special meeting of the People and Communities Committee was due to be held on 22 March to discuss issues around waste collection to which representatives from both the PSNI and Department for Infrastructure would be invited to attend. The Director noted other issues raised by Members to also be considered at the special P&C Committee meeting including a proposed communications plan for consideration of Members.