

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 16th March 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Alderman George Dorrian
Councillor Donal Lyons
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Mal O'Hara

Alison Allen, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Local Government Association (for Item 1)

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

Officers:

John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy
John Greer, Director of Economic Development (for Item 2)
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 3)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 4, 7 & 8)
Siobhan Toland, Director City Services (for Item 8)
Cathy Matthews Director, Resources and Fleet (for Item 8)
Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 8)

1. Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)

Alison Allen, Chief Executive, NILGA was in attendance, she presented a briefing for Members outlining the key role of NILGA in providing advice and policy support to the sector, and in particular support provided for Belfast. She outlined some of the key programmes of work that NILGA has taken forward including an update on key actions for Elected Member Development, Policy, Communications and Representation. Members also noted the outlined priorities for potential future support for Local Government and Belfast given Belfast's regional leadership role. Members thanked Alison for the update provided.

2. UK & Ireland Bid to host UEFA EURO 2028

The Director of Economic Development provided an update on the current status of the UK & Ireland Bid to host UEFA EURO 2028 which was previously considered at the February

Party Group Leaders Forum meeting. Members discussed the proposal, the requirement from Belfast and the challenging timescale involved in relation to the final bid submission to the Central Bid Team. There was detailed discussion in relation to the financial considerations and stadium provision and a report on the detail discussed will be submitted to March SP&R Committee for approval.

3. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update for Members on the current financial position for 2022-23. He advised that some funds have become available for potential re-allocation and whilst it had been agreed that reallocations of forecast departmental underspends would be considered as part of year end reporting, in this instance the underspend is from a specified reserve and not a departmental underspend and therefore members could consider to reallocate this for other purposes. A report will be presented to March SP&R with the detail of the funds available for Members consideration.

The Director also advised that a report would be submitted to March SP&R Committee providing an update on the proposed strategy to fund the 2023/24 budgetary gap and highlighting the need for a longer-term, forward-looking approach to rate setting.

4. Freedom of the City

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a proposed request from a Member for the conferment of the Freedom of the City. There was consensus from all Party Group Leaders to support the proposal. Members noted the current process for considering requests for Freedom of the City and noted the next steps in the process, following which a report will be submitted to March SP&R recommending that the award be made and requesting to set a date for a special meeting of the Council to formally consider the proposal.

5. Belfast Agenda Refresh

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy provided an update on the progress made to date on the development of the refreshed Belfast Agenda strategy document and action plan following the recent Continuing the Conversation engagement programme. He outlined the key engagement activity that will be taking place over the coming months in advance of the draft Belfast strategy being issued for formal consultation in early July 2023.

A report will be brought to Mach SP&R outlining the key next steps and timeframes along with a draft of the strategy document and action plan for Members consideration.

6. Chinese Ambassador Visit to Belfast

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy provided an update on an upcoming visit to Belfast of Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Mr Zheng Zeguang. Members noted the dates of the visit and the Ambassador's programme which will be led by The Northern Ireland Executive Office. Members also noted the Lord Mayor's civic participation in the programme. A number of issues were raised by Members in relation to both the upcoming visit and other Ambassadorial visits. It was agreed clarity would be sought on the issues raised and an update will be brought back to Party Group Leaders.

7. 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. She also advised that the Local Development Plan adoption date would be considered by the Planning Committee and it is anticipated that this would be in early May 2023. In relation to some queries raised by Members in relation to the implementation date and the impact for current applications already in the system the City Solicitor advised a report on the process will also be submitted to the Planning Committee on any potential implications.

A Member raised an issue in relation to city centre living and how this is considered within a strategic context. City Solicitor to follow up with the Director City Regeneration & Development.

8. AOB

Freedom of the City

Councillor Lyons outlined for Members a proposed request for a further conferment of the Freedom of the City. There was detailed discussion from Members and a general consensus that this request and any further requests would be considered in the new council term. Councillor Long also put forward a request for consideration which the City Solicitor noted.

Members also asked that further consideration was given for alternative options on how citizens could be recognised by the council. The City Solicitor to follow up and progress in advance of the new Council term.

City of Belfast School of Music – North Belfast

Councillor O'Hara raised an issue in relation to the City of Belfast School of Music based in North Belfast. Councillor O' Hara advised he had previously written to Party Group Leaders on this issue and there was consensus from all Party Group Leaders that he take forward the next steps as discussed and outlined.

Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illumination requests received namely:

- **National Day of Reflection** - 23 March
- **Brain Tumour Awareness** - 30 March
- **Endometriosis Awareness Month** – date to be agreed in line with availability
- **Global Intergenerational Week** - 24 April

Members noted the requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority. A member raised in query in relation to World Down Syndrome Day and the City Solicitor advised that this had already been actioned. The City Solicitor to review the process for illumination where possible repeated illuminations could be added to the schedule rather than being considered as separate requests annually.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway Signage

The Director Physical Programmes advised that Members had been updated previously that a request had been received for Irish language signage to be installed at Forth Meadow Community Greenway. She advised that the request has now been reviewed in line with the letter of offer and equality screening process and she presented the proposed approach and shared some proposed models for the signage. There was detailed discussion on the proposed approach and some other alternative options suggested by Members. It was also requested that the Director provides a briefing for those elected representatives within the specific areas of the greenway being discussed. The Director to consider the options discussed and arrange a briefing for Members and an update will then be brought back to Party Group Leaders in due course

Port Health Update

The Director City Services provided an update for Members in relation to the Port of Belfast operations and the ongoing engagement that is taking place with Belfast and other Councils following the publication of the UK Government published Windsor Framework. She also provided an update on the ongoing engagement that is taking place with DAERA, DEFRA and FSA. Members will be updated accordingly as this evolves.

Easter – Waste Collection Arrangements

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 holidays over the Easter period. She outlined the process to date and advised that final arrangements once confirmed would be circulated in a further written update for all Members in the coming weeks and in advance of the Easter holiday period.

Statues Update

The Director Physical Programmes presented the outcome of the recent tender process on the commissioning for two City Hall Statues. She advised that the procurement process was now complete and the recommendation from the Installations City Hall/City Hall Grounds Working Group would be considered by March SP&R. Members noted the timeline for design, manufacture and installation and that regular updates will be considered by the working group as this progresses. The Director provided clarity on some queries raised in relation to the unveiling for these statues and other commissioned statues and also on the development of narrative for the new pieces.

Olympia Leisure Centre

The City Solicitor provided an update on the EQIA process for bilingual signage at the Olympia Leisure Centre. It was noted that a report would be brought to March SP&R Committee outlining the proposed timeline.

Staff Car Parking

The Director of City & Organisational Strategy updated the Forum on the current proposals for Raphael Street staff car park and the subsequent impact for staff and the interim measures that would be put in place for staff using the car park. He advised that discussions were ongoing with the Trade Unions and that a meeting would be held with JNCC next week in advance of communication being issued to staff.

East Belfast GAA

Councillor Long raised an issue in relation to East Belfast GAA and requested an update for Party Group Leaders. The City Solicitor to follow up.

Bonfires

Councillor Long raised a query in relation to Bonfires and asked for an update on the scheduling for a meeting which had been agreed at Council. The Director City Services provided clarity on the query raised and to follow up accordingly.

Request for Use of City Hall

The City Solicitor outlined a request that had been received for the use of City Hall in relation to the upcoming anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement which Members noted.