

# **Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum**

## **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

### **Attendance**

Members:

Councillor Séamas de Faoite  
Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Ciaran Beattie  
Councillor Brian Smyth  
Alderman Sonia Copeland  
Councillor Sarah Bunting

**Apologies:** Councillor Christina Black

### **Officers:**

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance  
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 5 & 6)  
Adrian Ferguson, Senior Development Manager (for Item 2)  
Cate Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager (for Item 3)  
Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager (for Item 4)  
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 6)  
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### **1. Finance Update**

The Director of Finance & Resources presented the year end financial outturn for 2022/23 and outlined the implications for both the general and covid reserves. Members discussed in detail the proposals being considered and raised a number of queries specifically in relation to the allocation of micro and medium grants funding for which the Director of Finance and the Neighbourhood Service Manager provided clarity. It was agreed that the detail of the applications for funding received would be included in the annex to the report to SP&R in June and that the Director would liaise with C&NS and circulate information on the scoring matrix to Party Group Leaders to consider in advance of June SP&R committee.

A Member also stressed the need to exercise caution in relation to any reallocation of the year end surplus given the current challenges being experienced with central government budgets in the absence of a functioning Executive.

## **2. City Regeneration Institutional Investment Competitive Dialogue**

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members on the background to the institutional investors/strategic development partners expression of interest process and Members noted the number of expressions of interest received to date. He also outlined for Members the scale of the potential development opportunities which would be aligned to the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda, with inclusive placemaking a key component of any recommendation to award made. The Senior Development Manager then provided a briefing for Members on the Competitive Dialogue process, the proposed selection criteria and the key procurement aspects involved. Members noted that a report will be brought to a future meeting of both CG&R committee and SP&R committee for Members consideration, which will include an overview of the process which was followed as discussed, it is anticipated that this will be in August/September.

Some Members raised a number of issues in relation to investor options and previous developments already agreed within the city centre for which the Chief Executive provided clarity. It was also stressed that any recommendation to award should include strict controls to ensure agreed outcomes are achieved.

## **3. Pitches Strategy**

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided an update for Members in relation to the current Pitches Strategy which is currently over ten years old and the need for the development of a new strategy. Given that the sporting landscape has changed considerably since then there is also a need to undertake a piece of work to ascertain an updated baseline in order to inform the new strategy. It was noted that this baseline work and the development of the new strategy would need to align with other key sports/leisure strategies and programmes in place. Members highlighted the existing pressures on pitch allocation and that some sports have grown along with requirement for use of existing assets since the strategy was originally developed. The Chief Executive assured Members that this will all be considered in the development of the new strategy. Members to be kept updated as this work progresses.

Some Members also raised a separate query in relation to the infill for 3G and 4G pitches in relation to recent EU regulation changes and if they are applicable in Northern Ireland. The City Solicitor to follow up on the position and provide feedback to those Members imminently.

#### **4. PEACE PLUS Local Action Plan Update**

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided an update on the development of the PEACE PLUS 1.1. Co-designed Local Community Peace Action Plan for Belfast and the emerging work being undertaken. She advised that a report had been recently considered by the Shared City Partnership at its meeting on 12 June and that this would be included in the Shared City report to SP&R committee in June for Members consideration. Members discussed some of the challenges involved in the proposed budget allocation model for each theme and the challenges encountered previously with peace funding allocations. In relation to some concerns raised by a Member in relation to the consultation and engagement process the Neighbourhood Services Manager to follow up with the relevant officers.

#### **5. 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. There were some concerns raised by Members in relation to planning application processes and resourcing, the Chief Executive and City Solicitor to follow up with the Director of Planning.

#### **6. AOB**

##### **The MAC**

The Chief Executive provided a briefing for Members on recent correspondence received by him in relation to current funding arrangements for The Mac. An update to be circulated to Party Group Leaders for further consideration following the meeting and interim arrangements to be explored. Party Group Leaders to be kept updated following discussions.

##### **Chief Officer Recruitment**

The Director of Human Resources advised Members that the current Director of External Affairs, Marketing and Communications will be leaving her post in August 2023. She advised a report will be going to June SP&R seeking permission to recruit this post on a replacement basis and for the constitution of the selection panel. Given the recruitment will take place over the summer period it was agreed that the Director of Human Resources can commence the checking of availability for the selection panel. The Director to also consider a small

amendment to the timeframe outlined. Members also noted the proposed timeframes for the recruitment of other vacant Chief Officer posts.

### **World Road Running Championships 2025-2026**

The Chief Executive outlined recent correspondence he had received in relation to the World Road Running Championships 2025-2026 and outlined the request made. None of the Members were aware of the request and the Chief Executive outlined the funding challenges involved which was noted by Members.

### **Designated Flag Days 2023**

Members noted the designated flag days for 2023.

### **Illuminate Requests**

In line with the item above and the date of 14 November being a designated day for the Kings birthday it was noted that the city hall would be illuminated for the Kings birthday on 14th November 2023. This is in line with previous illumination for the Queen's birthday. It was agreed that an existing illumination request for that date for World Diabetes Day would be offered an alternative date.

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

- **Memorial Week of the Srebrenica Genocide** - 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023
- **Childhood cancer awareness** – 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 *date tbc*
- **Trans Pride Festival Northern Ireland** – 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023
- **Secondary Breast Cancer** - 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Members noted the requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

### **Bye Laws**

In response to an issue raised by a Member about amplification in the City Centre particularly at the front of City Hall the City Solicitor advised that the city centre bye laws report was drafted and she would circulate to Party Group Leaders and then bring the report to June SP&R committee. The Chief Executive also advised that he was meeting with PSNI and

would raise this as an issue of concern again. It was also noted that there were amplification issues in Donegall Square West to be followed up also.

### **Cenotaph**

In response to an issue raised by a Member in relation to the Cenotaph, the Chief Executive advised that a deep clean was already scheduled to take place in advance of the upcoming Somme commemoration.