

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 14th September 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Michael Long
Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Brian Smyth
Alderman Dean McCullough

Apologies: Alderman Sonia Copeland, Councillor Sarah Bunting, Councillor Christina Black

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources
David Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 1,3 & 4)
Stevie Lavery, Programme Manager (for Item 1)
Martin Doherty, Programme Delivery Manager (for Items 4 & 7)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 5, 6 & 7)
Kate Bentley, Director of Planning & Building Control (for Item 5 & 7)
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development (for Item 7)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. PEACE PLUS

The Programme Manager provided an update on the development of the PEACE PLUS

1.1. Local Community Peace Action Plan for Belfast and the emerging work being undertaken. He outlined the proposed timeline, governance and administration arrangements and the approximate costings for key elements of the programme. Members discussed some of the challenges involved particularly in relation to the employability concept in the model and the challenges encountered previously with peace funding allocations and capacity issues. Members asked for further information on some of the detail of the projects discussed and the Programme Manager to provide a further update to Party Group Leaders.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance outlined for Members details of the council's Statement of Accounts, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31 March 2023. The Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position. A report will go to September SP&R for Members approval in advance of the accounts being published by the 30 September deadline.

The Director also provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2024/25. He outlined the work undertaken to date to identify and deliver opportunities for cost savings, income generation and service delivery review across departments. It was noted that Departments are currently considering these efficiencies as part of the rate setting and corporate planning process and an update will be included in the report to September SP&R Committee in line with the agreement that Members receive monthly rate update reports to enable the striking of the district rate by February 2024.

3. Shankill Memorial Garden

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided an update on the maintenance work being undertaken in the Shankill memorial garden as requested by local elected Members in the area. He advised that a subsequent request for the planting of some trees as way of memorial had been received for the upcoming 30th Anniversary. Members noted that the location for the proposed tree planting was in a council owned area outside of the existing memorial garden. It was noted that an update on the request received and the plans discussed will be included in the physical programme report that will be considered by Members at September SP&R.

4. Blanchflower Park

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented a briefing on a proposed capital project put forward by the IFA in partnership with the Council and other key partners. He outlined the background to the proposal, the site location details including projected budget and the key next steps. The Director stressed that this proposal was one of other potential locations with other landowners and the site selection process was still in the early stages. There was detailed discussion with Members, and it was noted that community engagement should be

key to any discussions taking place and also the alignment to existing council led sports and leisure strategies being developed. There was consensus for Officers to engage in further conversations with the IFA and partners and an update to be brought back to Party Group Leaders for further consideration as this work progresses.

5. Planning Update

The Director of Planning & Building Control 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 was a number of queries raised for which the Director provided clarity and it was noted that those issues raised would be a matter for the planning committee to consider.

6. October Council Meeting

The City Solicitor advised that the opening of the One Young World Summit 2023 is taking place on Monday 2 October, which is the same date as the scheduled October Council meeting. She advised that invitations to the opening had been issued to the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive and Elected Representatives. Given the timings for both coincided she sought the views of Members in relation to the timing of the October meeting. The City Solicitor to consider the options discussed and follow up with Party Group Leaders.

7. AOB

International Homecoming and associated Inward Delegation

The Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive outlined for Members a request for a roundtable discussion with a representative from each political party in the Council as part of the International Homecoming programme. The delegation will be here from 26 – 30 September and the proposal is to hold the roundtable discussion on the afternoon of Thursday 28 September. The International Relations Manager to follow up with Party Group Leaders and provide full details of agenda, confirmed timings and location.

Dual language street signs - Gaeltacht Quarter

Members noted the update provided by the Director of Planning & Building Control on the Dual language street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter proposal which was previously agreed

in principle at the March Council meeting. Members noted the work that has been progressing following Call In given that the Counsel opinion was that the Call In had no merit. She then outlined the proposals for progressing. A report outlining the proposed way forward for the erection of dual language street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter will be submitted to October SP&R for Members consideration. In relation to a query raised by a Member the Director outlined the projected costings and it was agreed that these would be circulated to Party Group Leaders in advance.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund – Site Visits

The Programme Delivery Manager provided an update on the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund site visits currently underway and those upcoming in the following week. Party Group Leaders to follow up with their individual party representatives as a reminder.

Northern Ireland Investment Summit 2023

The Director of City Regeneration & Development and the Chief Executive provided an update on the recent Investment Summit which was organised by the Department for Business & Trade (DBT), Invest NI and the Northern Ireland Office. They outlined for Members the detail of the presentations and the round table discussions that took place including a briefing on the key messages emerging from the summit.

Request for use of Open Space

The Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined a request for the use of Barnetts Demense for a Twilight Walk. Members noted the request would be agreed under the Directors delegated authority.

City Hall Grounds Request

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members on a recent request received for the use of City Hall Grounds. The City Solicitor to follow up on response as discussed.