

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 11th December 2025

Attendance

Members:

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

Apologies: Councillor Natasha Brennan, Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property and Projects
Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Jim Girvan Director of Neighbourhood Services (for Items 1,2 & 8)
Pól Hamilton, Lead Officer, Community Provision (for Items 1 & 2)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Summer Community Diversionary Programme - Dr Jonny Byrne

The Chief Executive welcomed Dr Jonny Byrne who presented an update on the Summer Community Diversionary Programme along with the emerging findings from the review of the programme in 2025. Members discussed the key principles of the programme, the criteria against which applications would be assessed and the funding model options for the programme for 2026. There was detailed discussion in relation to the options presented and the challenges faced this year and the need to consider some flexibility within the programme for future years. It was also agreed that engagement was needed with communities in some parts of the city in advance of the application process opening. Officers to further consider the points raised and the feedback provided by Members in advance of a report being brought back for consideration in January.

2. Bonfire Update - Dr Jonny Byrne

Dr Jonny Byrne also presented an update on the the Bonfire programme and outlined the proposed governance arrangements going forward and outlined the proposed timeline for engagement with the relevant stakeholders. It is anticipated that a Memorandum of

Understanding would then be drawn up between the partners. An update will be brought back to the forum as this work progresses.

3. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2026/27. He advised that Director challenge meetings in relation to the draft departmental estimates, growth proposals and efficiencies had now concluded. Members were advised at a high level of the growth proposals, the efficiency proposals emerging from the recent Efficiency and Transformation workshop and the Capital Financing position.

The Director also advised that the first draft Estimated Penny Product (EPP) had been notified to Councils and he outlined the detail of which incorporating the outcome of Reval 2026 which will be included in the Rates report to December SP&R Committee to quantify the impact on the revenue estimates for 2026/27 and the medium term.

It was noted a further Transformation and Efficiency Workshop will be held in January 2026 and that Party Group Briefings will also be arranged for January in order for the level of the District Rate to be set for 2026/27 by the 15 February 2026.

4. Sponsorship Request – Lewis Crocker

The Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services provided a briefing in relation to a request received for sponsorship for the Lewis Crocker fight proposed to be held at Windsor Park in 2026 and advised that a similar request had also been made to NI Executive. The Director outlined the sponsorship arrangements previously provided for the Carl Frampton fight on the Titanic slipways in 2014. Members discussed the socio-economic benefits for the city from hosting large scale sporting events but also highlighted funding concerns for amateur boxing organisations which needed to be taken into consideration when considering this request. It was noted that the Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services would further explore in terms of joint funding from the NI Executive and an update to be brought back once engagement has taken place. In relation to the issues raised about amateur boxing it was noted that a Boxing Strategy report will be brought to December SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

5. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy provided a brief update in relation to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann work programme. The Director of Communications, Marketing & External Affairs also presented the marketing approach for the event and outlined the marketing & communication activity taking place and the channels being utilised in order to build momentum. Members also noted the strategic phasing across the markets outlined and the timeframes in which this would take place.

6. Assembly Rooms Cluster update

The Director of City Regeneration & Development provided an update on the work ongoing following the acquisition of the Assembly Rooms and adjacent properties, specifically the engagement with the World Monuments Fund. The Director outlined the detail of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding with World Monument Fund which has been reviewed by Legal Services and subject to agreement at a future SP&R Committee, will form the intentions of the Council's partnership with World Monument Fund. It was noted that a visit to the site would be arranged for Party Group Leaders.

7. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on a number of planning matters which were currently live. An issue was raised in relation to a specific site and the City Solicitor agreed to follow up on this with Planning Service.

8. AOB

Update to Standing Orders

A Member raised a query in relation to the amendment to the standing orders on the process for reconsidering decisions which have been subject to call in and the ongoing legal proceedings. The City Solicitor provided an update and agreed that recent correspondence received from the Minister for Communities referred to at November SP&R would be circulated to Party Group Leaders for information. Given the complexities involved it was agreed a high level summary would also be circulated.

Proposal to host Large Scale Event

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy provided a briefing for Members on a request received to be a host city and partner in a large scale event in Belfast in 2028 and potentially

2030. The Director provided an update on the background to the request, the partnership package proposed and the indicative cost of hosting the event. Following discussion in relation to the financial implications, budgetary constraints and resource requirements given existing obligations it was noted that further exploratory work is required in relation to the extent of funding commitment from other sources. The Director to follow up and a report brought back to a future meeting.

Loftlines Site Visit

The Director of City Regeneration & Development referred to the postponement of the scheduled visit for Party Group Leaders to the Loftlines development. It was noted that a rescheduled visit would be arranged with the invite to be opened up to all Members. The Director highlighted the timescales involved in order to accommodate the visit and will follow up after the meeting.

Display of Flags

The Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services referred to the display of flags in some council owned assets. The Director advised that local engagement had taken place however the flags still remained in place. A list of the sites discussed to be circulated following the meeting and a report on next steps to remove the materials to be brought to a future SP&R Committee.

Victoria Square

The Chief Executive provided an update on the investigation regarding some of the apartments at Victoria Square and the temporary closure of Montgomery Street following information received regarding safety concerns. Members noted that the closure of Montgomery Street was and still remains a precautionary measure, taken in the interest of public safety. It was noted that the recommendation remains that Montgomery Street remains closed while the investigations continue.

Illuminate request

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received for Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January 2026. Members noted the request would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

Leisure Transformation Programme

The Director of Property & Projects advised that following recent party group briefings on the proposed next steps for the next phase of the Leisure Programme a best practice visit to look at how leisure facilities are delivered in London is being organised for early 2026. Members

discussed the benefits of the visit in identifying potential unique selling points for the next phase of the programme. The itinerary and dates will follow from the Director imminently.

Masterplan for Girdwood

The Director of Property & Projects referred to the Girdwood Masterplan for the Girdwood site giving an update on the current status of the remaining elements including the leisure development and the mixed-use site which is being led by the Department for Communities. Members agreed in principle to Officers engaging with the Department to progress the mixed use site. Further updates will be brought back in due course.

Communications

The Director of Communications, Marketing & External Affairs advised that communications for the upcoming Holiday arrangements including bin collections had been issued. Members noted and agreed to amplify the messaging.

A Member raised a query in relation to communication on planning application updates that was circulated to Members and it was noted this would be followed up with the Director of Planning and Building Control.

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