

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Tuesday 13th January 2026

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Natasha Brennan
Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Jenna Maghie
Councillor Brian Smyth

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
Kate Bentley, Director of Planning & Building Control
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Pól Hamilton, Lead Officer, Community Provision
Cate Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager
Geoff Dickson, Strategic Planning & Policy Manager (secretariat)

1. Summer Community Diversionary Fund

The Director of Neighbourhood Services updated the Forum on the revised criteria for the Summer Community Diversionary Fund, the timetable for the fund and proposed funding models. Members present were supportive of the approach and agreed the proposals should be brought to Committee, seeking authority to have the fund over a three year period, with a strict provision that there are break clauses built in to each contract that would allow a contract to be reviewed on an annual basis.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2026/27. He advised that Party Group Briefings have been completed and that the upcoming SP&R workshop on 15th January would be used to discuss the rates setting for 2026/ 27.

3. Physical Activity & Sports Development Strategy

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented a high level overview of the draft Physical Activity & Sports Development Strategy to Members. The Director outlined the research

undertaken and their findings, the vision for the strategy, the six key priorities, next steps in finalising the draft strategy and an outline of some funding options that will be brought to Members with the strategy.

Members thanked The Director for the update and suggested that, when consulting on the strategy following Committee approval, that organisations who have been involved in using sport as a means of tackling deprivation and health inequalities should be consulted with as their experience and expertise would be invaluable.

Members requested that, given the significance of the strategy, it be brought to Party Group Briefings in advance of being brought to Committee.

4. Community Support Plan – Large Grants

The Director of Neighbourhood Services referred to the approach agreed by SP&R Committee for the new large grant funding programme 2026-2029 as part of the overall new Community Support Plan 2025-2029. He outlined the grant process to date, the staged process of assessing applications and an anonymised summary of the outcome of the assessment process. The Director also outlined how the total value of grant applications that were assessed at stage 2 were greater than the financial envelope currently agreed for the grants.

The Director agreed to circulate the Community Support Plan slides presented to Party Group Leaders for further consideration in advance of discussion at the SP&R workshop on 15th January. Following the workshop, a report will be brought to SP&R Committee on 23rd January.

5. Planning Update

The Director of Planning & Building Control updated the Forum on the live planning applications that will be brought to January Committee.

Following a query from a Member, it was agreed to invite Tribeca to a Party Group Leader meeting for an update on progress.

Following a separate query from a Member, the Director of Planning & Building Control reiterated that major development applications with 100% social housing are legally

competent from a planning perspective. This has been reiterated to officers and will be communicated to developers as enquiries are made.

A Member informed the Director that the monthly update on applications received was no longer received by Members. The Director undertook to ensure these are recommenced.

6. AOB

Procedure for Renaming Streets

The Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined the current process for street renaming, the relevant legislation and the procedural considerations relating to the re-naming of streets in the city.

Members agreed that a report be brought to SP&R Committee explaining the current street re-naming policy.

Bonfires

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reported that some potential bonfire materials had been left at a number of sites on Council and non-Council land.

Following a query from a Member regarding one of the sites, the Director of Planning & Building Control agreed to consider the options regarding dangerous notices. It was also confirmed that the NIEA have cleared a site.

A Member noted that at one site some bonfire materials have moved closer to an interface, housing and a major road. The Director of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the site will be closely monitored.

Illuminate Request

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received for Belfast Mela on 30th August 2026. Members noted the request would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

Issues raised by a Member

A Member requested that a report be brought to SP&R Committee on the use of social medial channels and the potential to stop the Council from using X. It was agreed that a report would be brought to SP&R Committee on 23 January.