

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 11th June 2026

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Councillor Ian McLaughlin
Councillor Ronan McLaughlin
Councillor Áine Groogan
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Michael Long

Apologies: Councillor Micky Murray, Councillor Brian Smyth

Officer:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Nora Largery, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy
Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Stephen Leonard Director City & Neighbourhood Services (*for Item 6*)
Brenda Murphy, City Innovation Broker (*for Item 6*)
Godfrey McCartney, Good Relations Manager (*for Item 9*)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Event Space

The Director of Property and Projects referred to the ongoing engagement with Key Stakeholders in relation to the potential event space at Boucher Road Playing Fields.

Members noted that whilst stakeholders were due to attend today's meeting, discussions were still ongoing and the results of site surveys in relation to pitches were being reviewed. It was therefore agreed that the deputation would be invited to a future meeting to allow for further consideration of surveys and engagement to take place.

The Director also provided an update on the ongoing issue in relation to a piece of land at the site and Members discussed next steps and noted an update will be provided for Members following ongoing engagement with the relevant parties involved.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance & Resources presented the year-end financial outturn for 2025/26 and outlined the implications for the general reserves. Members also discussed the options for reallocation of the year end balances and noted the importance of setting aside monies in order to manage rate base fluctuations and any potential clawbacks given the degree of variation between the EPP and the APP over recent years. In relation to a query raised by a Member the Director advised that focused engagement takes place regularly with Land and Property Services as part of the rate setting process. The June SP&R finance report will include the recommendations as outlined and it was agreed a copy of the presentation shared would be circulated following the meeting.

The Director also referred to the due diligence process that had been undertaken for a request for funding previously considered by SP&R Committee. Members noted the update provided and that an update would be brought to June SP&R Committee for Members to further consider.

3. Belfast Stories

The Programme Director Belfast Stories provided an update in relation to the recent market engagement exercise for potential users undertaken to better understand the market and inform the event space use and requirements for Belfast Stories. Members noted the channels used in order to promote the open call process the detail of the responses received to date and the feedback provided by interested parties. Detailed discussion ensued in relation to the market engagement exercise undertaken and some points were raised by some Members that it was felt the exercise undertaken did not fully address all the issues raised at Council. Given the issues raised and the discussion that took place the Director to arrange Party Briefings on the process undertaken for the market engagement piece and the key findings emerging in advance of June SP&R Committee. Members also noted the impact in relation to the design development and the preparation of the Full Business Case should the report not be brought to June SP&R Committee for consideration.

4. Governance Review

The City Solicitor outlined the ongoing programme of work in relation to Phase 1 of the Governance Review which Members previously considered at May SP&R Committee. Party Group Briefings have now been arranged to discuss further and to provide Members with an opportunity to provide feedback. Given that some briefings have been scheduled post June

SP&R Committee an updated version of the Constitution and each of the supporting documents will be brought back to SP&R Committee in August for Members consideration and approval. Following discussion it was agreed that the report to August Committee would also include a summary update on progress in relation to Phase 2 of the review.

5. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy presented a summary update in relation to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann work programme and outlined the work underway across a number of core workstreams including an update on the event management plan, campsite provision, traffic and transport plan and staff resourcing. The Director also advised that further engagement with local communities will take place in the coming weeks. The Director noted the points raised by Members, including an issue previously raised in relation to funding for fringe events and the Director to follow up accordingly. It was also agreed that Officers explore how to visually present a map of all activity and programming in order to present at the next Party Group Leaders meeting. A report on the detail discussed will be brought to June SP&R Committee.

6. City Innovation Update

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on city innovation matters including next steps in relation to the Belfast Region Advanced Wireless Connectivity Technologies programme of work and the submission to the European Capital of Innovation Awards 2027. Members also noted the work packages and planned phases of the Alleyways transformation programme.

The Director City & Neighbourhood Services also outlined the work underway in relation to the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge, alleyways transformation programme. Members noted the programme work packages, future planned phases and the focus for the next six months. The Director and City Innovation Broker provided clarity for those queries raised in relation to the sponsorship role outlined, it was agreed the presentation would be circulated to Members following the meeting to allow Members to further consider.

Arising from discussion, Members made a number of points about potential options for the allocation of funding set aside in specified reserves for the transformation of alleyways and in particular the alleygates programme. Officers agreed to explore those points made in order to ensure a coordinated approach to alleyway transformation to enhance the Bloomberg programme of work.

A composite report on all the matters discussed will be brought to June SP&R Committee for consideration.

7. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on a number of planning matters which were currently live. In relation to a specific query raised by a Member the City Solicitor to follow up with the Director of Planning.

Members also discussed the use of student accommodation outside of term time and an update to be brought back to the Forum in due course.

8. Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received. Members noted the following requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **250th anniversary of the United States of America's Declaration of Independence**
– 4 July 2026
- **Remembering Srebrenica** – 8 July 2026

9. AOB

PEACEPLUS Action Plan

The Good Relations Manager referred to the PEACEPLUS action plan and provided an update on the mobilisation of the Distillery Street regeneration project included within the plan. Members noted the feedback following the community consultation exercise for the project and the subsequent discussions which took place with the Department of Justice. The Director also outlined proposed next steps in order to address the issues outlined. Following detailed discussion and given there was no consensus on the approach outlined a report will be brought to SP&R Committee for Members consideration. The Good Relations Manager to also follow up in relation to the request for further information on the consultation responses received.

Current Events in the City

The Chief Executive and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services provided a briefing for Members in relation to the ongoing impacts of disorder in the City. Members noted the work ongoing with statutory agencies and the support that was being provided across the city. Members also noted the key contacts within the Council for Members should they require further information or have any queries. The Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services to follow up on the points raised by Members and the Chief Executive advised that Members will be kept informed over the coming days.