

## **Minutes of Budget and Transformation Panel Meeting 10 August 2017**

### **Attendance**

#### Members:

Councillor Deirdre Hargey (Chair),  
Councillor Tim Attwood  
Councillor Billy Hutchinson  
Councillor Michael Long  
Councillor Jim McVeigh  
Councillor Lee Reynolds  
Alderman Jim Rodgers (for Alderman D Browne)

Apologies: Alderman Browne

#### Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive  
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources  
Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects  
John Walsh, City Solicitor  
Mark McBride, Head of Finance and Performance  
Phil Williams, Director of Planning and Place (for item 6)  
Emer Husbands, Strategic Performance Manager (secretariat)

### **1. Finance Update**

#### a. Quarter 1 Finance 2017/18

The Deputy Chief Executive circulated a report on the quarter 1 finance position which would be presented to the August SP&R Committee. Given that the forecast outturn is based at an early stage in the financial year, he recommended that no in year budget reallocations should be considered until the Quarter 2 position is presented to the Committee in November 2017. Members discussed the need to begin to develop priority areas for possible re-allocation of non-recurrent spend. They also highlighted the need to support communities to develop feasibility studies for possible projects, which was becoming more costly and it was agreed that the Director of Property and Projects would prepare a paper on the issues surrounding the costs of preparing capital project applications. In relation to the rate base concern was expressed in relation to half finished buildings that were exempt from paying rates and it was agreed a mapping exercise would be carried out to identify the buildings and possible meanwhile uses for them. This will be lead by the Director of Finance and Resources and Director of City Centre Development.

b. Medium Term Financial Plan

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the assessment of the key financial factors which influence the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2018/19 - 2020/21 and the timetable for the rate setting process for 2018/19. He highlighted that the main uncontrollable cost risk to the Council in the medium term is the impact of externally imposed increases to the Council's pay bill. Work was now commencing on the development of departmental estimates and regular updates and briefings would be provided to members throughout the process.

c. Efficiency Programme

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined to the Panel a number of the proposed areas that have been identified for securing the previously agreed efficiency target for the 2018/19 budget. Party Group Briefings were now scheduled for August to provide members with more detail on each area. This would also form part of the rate setting process.

## **2. Physical Programme**

The Director of Property and Projects provided an update to members on a number of decisions relating to the capital programme that would be presented to August SP&R for decisions. This included the proposed upgrade work to the Cenotaph to improve accessibility and address any health and safety issues. He also discussed the need to make decisions in relation to the Christmas Lighting Signage at the City Hall to enable the installation to take place in advance of the Christmas market.

A recommendation would also be presented on the possible sale of Cregagh Park East and members of the panel highlighted that there had been a lot of discussion with all the local representatives in the DEA and there was agreement that this was the best way forward. The Director of Property and Projects was asked to e-mail all the local representatives to explain to them that this decision was now going to be considered by the SP&R committee on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

## **3. European Capital of Culture 2023**

The Chief Executive outlined to the Panel the ongoing work on the development of the European Capital of Culture bid with Derry and Strabane District Council and in particular the need to promote and support the bid at national, regional and local level. She reminded them that a second workshop was being held at the beginning of September for members to provide a detailed update on the engagement process and the associated themes for the bid

as well as an overview of programme content. They would discuss the level of financial commitment required and the development of an associated funding strategy.

#### **4. City Region Growth Deal**

The Chief Executive provided the Panel with an update on the proposed City Region Growth Deal which has involved further defining the geographic area and the financial modelling around this. A workshop will be planned with members to provide more detail on this with a report to SP&R in September.

#### **5. Belfast Brand**

Copies of the new Belfast Brand were circulated and the Chief Executive explained that this would be rolled out over the coming weeks and months. The brand itself has been well received by the key stakeholders and partners in the city who have also agreed to include it in their promotional materials, signage etc.

#### **6. Planning Updates**

The Director of Planning and Place outlined to the Panel progress against the key actions in the Planning Improvement Plan, highlighting the reduction in the legacy applications and ongoing work in relation to Section 76. Members welcomed the improvements and discussed the ongoing need to improve customer contact and response times to queries. The Director also informed the panel of the applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee this month.

#### **7. AOB**

##### **Party Leaders Forum**

The next Party Leaders Forum is scheduled for Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August at 10.00 am. A number of items were already on the agenda from the previous meeting and party leaders should contact the CX office if they would like anything additional included. The CX office will circulate the agenda in advance of the meeting.