

Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum

10th June 2021

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Áine Groogan (Chair)
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Nuala McAlister
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Alderman Brian Kingston
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Ryan Murphy (for Cllr Beattie)

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson

Officers:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
John Walsh, City Solicitor
Alistair Reid, Director of Place and Economy (for Items 2 & 6)
Wendy Langham, Programme Director Belfast Destination Hub (for Item 2)
Paul Gribben, Head of Digital Services (for Item 4)
John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy (for Item 5)
Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 9)
Cathy Reynolds, Director City Regeneration & Development (for Item 9)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Year End Finance 2020/21

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance outlined for Members the 5-step financial strategy agreed in June 2020 to manage the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. He presented the year-end financial outturn for 2020/21 and outlined the implications for general reserves and proposals for the reallocation of the year end surplus. Members noted that the proposals that will be presented to SP&R committee are made in the context of non-recurrent funding and are aligned to the Council's priorities. Two reports will be presented to June SP&R Committee, namely a Finance Update report and a non-recurrent reallocations report.

Members also noted the significant lead in time required in terms of running the Summer Community Diversionary Festivals (SCDF) Programme, with calls for applications historically opening in March. This was not feasible for 2021 due to NI Executive restrictions at that time.

The Director advised an update will be provided to SP&R Committee recommending that the funding is not redistributed but held and utilised for events later in the year when further easing of restrictions allow for larger events.

2. Destination Hub

It was noted that the Members of the SP and R Committee and Party Leaders received an update on the proposed site acquisition for the Destination Hub at a briefing held in May. The City Solicitor advised discussions on the site acquisition are still ongoing and a report will be brought to SP and R when discussions have been finalised.

3. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Belfast Region City Deal. She advised that, further to the update to May's SP and R Committee, work has continued on the draft Deal document. Discussions are also ongoing with the Department for Infrastructure and Department of Finance on proposals for an Infrastructure pillar level budget to allow the Infrastructure projects to continue to the next stage of development as part of the phased deal approach. An update report outlining progress to allow phased delivery to commence will be brought to the SP and R committee in August.

4. Cyber Security Update

The Head of Digital Services presented to Members an outline of a proposed cyber programme of work for the protection of Council networks, data and services. He explained that cyber incidents have increased worldwide and become more sophisticated in their nature especially since the start of the pandemic and discussed the changing attack landscape. Members highlighted the importance of this programme of work and noted a report will be brought to a future meeting of SP&R Committee for Members consideration. In relation to a query raised by a Member in relation to a shared model for the public sector the Head of Digital Services advised that the Council are represented on a number of regional groups in relation to Cyber Security, however different networks will have different requirements.

5. Corporate Delivery Plan 2021/22

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised that amendments had been made to the draft Corporate Delivery Plan 2021/22 following the recent special meeting held with Party Leaders. The updated copy has been circulated and Members agreed to feedback any further changes they may have to the Director by Friday 11 June, in advance of June's SP&R committee meeting

6. Planning Update

The Director of Place and Economy updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in June. Members discussed that there may be a requirement to hold an in-person meeting of the Planning committee in August to deal with planning applications that cannot be made under delegated authority. The Director of Place and Economy to keep Members informed if this is the case.

7. AOB

Social Value Procurement Policy

The City Solicitor outlined the significant amount of work that has been undertaken in developing a proposed Social Value Procurement Policy. A copy of the draft policy has been circulated to Party Leaders. It was agreed Members would feedback to the City Solicitor any comments they may have in advance of the report going to June SP&R committee for approval.

City Hall Proposed recovery plan

The City Solicitor provided an overview of the proposed plans for City Hall operational recovery and the steps for a phased reopening, further to the Northern Ireland Executive relaxations effective from 24 May 2021. Members discussed the key phases and what the process would be should the situation change. The City Solicitor advised that the reopening will be under continual review in line with NI Executive guidelines. A report on this will be brought to June SP&R committee.

Arrangements for Future Council/Committee Meetings

The City Solicitor provided an update on the legislation for the holding of remote committees. He advised that it is anticipated that it is unlikely the legislation will be in place before the Assembly recess begins on 3 July. Options were discussed specifically for the Special Council meeting on 1st July for the Somme Anniversary as well as options for the Monthly Council meeting in July. A report will be brought to June SP&R outlining the options for Members consideration.

The City Solicitor advised that some key decisions going to June SP&R committee cannot be made under delegated authority due to their nature. Therefore, it was proposed that if the

Somme Anniversary meeting goes ahead in-person as proposed a special council meeting is held just before to agree these key decisions.

Site Acquisition

The Chief Executive and Director City Regeneration & Development outlined for Members a potential proposal for a Site Acquisition in the City Centre. Following detailed discussion, given the timeframes involved, it was agreed a report would be brought to June SP&R committee for Members consideration. If agreed, the decision would then be brought to the proposed Special Council meeting due to the nature of the request. The Director City Regeneration & Development did caveat that there may be other interested parties which Members noted.

North Foreshore - Site Option Agreement

Councillors O' Hara and Lyons declared an interest in relation to this item in that they are members of the Belfast Harbour Board. It was noted when the decision is brought to SP&R Committee they will both leave the meeting.

The City Solicitor and Director of Physical Programmes provided an update on a proposed Site Option Agreement with Belfast Harbour Commissioners at the North Foreshore. In relation to a legal query raised by a Member the City Solicitor provided an update on current position. A report will be brought to June SP&R committee and if agreed will be brought to the proposed Special Council meeting due to the nature of the request.

Community Renewal & Levelling up fund

Members noted that at the May SP&R Committee meeting, a report was presented on the UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF) and three proposed bids were agreed under the Chief Executives delegated authority. It was also agreed the Chief Executive would have delegated authority in respect of any other bids identified for this fund. The Director of Physical Programmes outlined for Members a further proposal identified, to commission a feasibility study that would examine, across the city, options to deliver on enhanced city and community connectivity projects to include active travel, greenways, enhanced access and supporting active travel and connectivity infrastructure type projects. Members welcomed the additional proposal, and this will now be worked up for submission.

Members were also updated on the UK Levelling Up Fund at May SP&R, and it was agreed that officers work towards progressing suitable bids for Round 2. Members discussed requests from two external organisations who are submitting bids for Phase 1 and had asked

for a letter from Council in support of their application. Members agreed and the Director of Physical Programmes to progress.