

# **Minutes of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum**

## **13th January, 2022**

### **Attendance**

#### **Members:**

Councillor Billy Hutchinson

Councillor Nuala McAlister

Councillor Donal Lyons

Councillor Mal O'Hara

Councillor Dale Pankhurst (for Alderman Kingston)

Councillor Ryan Murphy (for Councillor Ciaran Beattie)

**Apologies:** Alderman Brian Kingston, Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Councillor Áine Groogan, Alderman Sonia Copeland and Councillor Fiona Ferguson.

#### **Officers:**

Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources

John Walsh, City Solicitor

John Greer, Director of Economic Development (Item 6 AOB - St Patrick's Day 2022)

Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

### **1. Finance**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources outlined for Members the ongoing process to develop the revenue estimates and setting of the District Rate for 2022/23. He advised that the cash limits for People and Communities and the City Growth and Regeneration committees have now been agreed, with the Planning committee due to consider their cash limit on 18th January. A report will then be presented to January's SP and R for Members to agree the cash limits for Committees and the level of the District Rate to be set for 2022/23

He reminded Members that the setting of the District Rate is a decision which must be made at a meeting of the Council and, legally, this decision must be made by 15th February 2022.

### **2. Covid Update**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the current rising infection rates of Covid-19 and how it was impacting on Council services. Members were advised that staff who are reporting as Covid positive and unable to work is increasing along with a rise in numbers who may have had a possible exposure. He advised

that the indications are that this will continue to peak in the coming weeks. In light of this the main focus for the organisation at present and in the immediate future is sustaining and maintaining operations for critical and vital services. In relation to queries raised by Members on Waste Collection operations, it was noted that this was being closely monitored along with current absence numbers in order to ensure front line and critical services are delivered.

Members also noted that Lateral Flow Tests are available for staff in order to support self-testing and the collection points have been communicated to staff.

### **3. Reconfiguration of Brexit Committee**

The City Solicitor provided an update on the report that was considered by November's SP and R Committee and ratified by December Council to realign the Brexit Committee as a Climate and City Resilience Committee. Members had requested some amendments to the draft Terms of Reference and the City Solicitor presented the updated version which incorporated the amendments previously discussed. In relation to a query raised by a Member regarding a specific term in the Terms of Reference the City Solicitor outlined the decision-making process for its inclusion.

The Climate and City Resilience Committee, once established, will initially be providing a political oversight and monitoring role and, therefore, the City Solicitor advised that it is proposed in the initial stages that it would not require a dedicated committee budget. Following discussion, Members raised a number of points for consideration in the longer term for a dedicated budget aligned to the committee which were noted. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources provided clarity on the departmental budgets that would be aligned to the remit of the Committee.

Members noted the Membership arrangements and proposed staff resources for the Committee. A report will be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in January seeking approval for the updated draft Terms of Reference for the realigned Climate and City Resilience Committee.

### **4. City Centre Bye-Laws**

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members in relation to the city centre bye laws report which was referred back to the SP and R committee following the November Council meeting. He outlined to the Forum the key revisions to the proposed Bye-laws following Party Group Briefings and Members feedback. There was detailed discussion on the revisions outlined, the challenges involved and the legalities around enforcement. The City Solicitor provided clarity on the issues discussed and advised that legal counsel may be required going forward.

He advised that a report will be brought to SP and R Committee in February outlining the key next steps for consideration.

## **5. Planning Update**

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in January. Members discussed the ongoing issues with statutory consultees and noted that some of these issues will be discussed at the upcoming Joint meeting with NI Water and Party Group Leaders.

Members also noted an update on the timeline for the NI Audit Office audit of the planning system in Northern Ireland.

## **6. AOB**

### **St. Patrick's Day 2022**

The Director of Economic Development provided an update for Members on the new approach to St Patricks Day from 2022 onwards which was considered at SP and R Committee in December. Members had agreed at the December meeting to extend the development phase for two of the projects, to enable each of them to provide an updated proposal following engagement with Officers. The Director provided a briefing on the updated proposals for both projects. A report will be brought to January SP and R Committee for Members' consideration. In relation to a query raised by a Member, he advised that the detail on this will be included in the SP and R report.

### **Illuminate – Call in**

Members noted an update on a Call in made in relation to an Illuminate request. Counsel opinion will be considered by SP and R Committee at the January meeting.

### **Customer Hub**

Councillor Lyons highlighted a request for the use of council spaces when the Customer Hub is fully operational post pandemic and Members discussed what that might entail. The City Solicitor to follow this up with Facilities Management.

### **Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum – March 2022 Meeting**

Members agreed that the March Forum meeting, which was due to fall on St. Patrick's Day 2022, now be held on Friday 18th March 2022 at 10.00 a.m.