

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

Thursday 13th August 2026

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Sarah Bunting

Councillor Séamas de Faoite

Councillor Ian McLaughlin

Councillor Ciran Beattie

Councillor Ronan McLaughlin

Councillor Áine Groogan (*for Cllr Smyth*)

Councillor Micky Murray

Apologies: Councillor Brian Smyth, Alderman Sonia Copeland

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

David Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services

Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development

Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control

Dermot O'Kane, Acting Planning Manager (Development Planning & Policy)

Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty

David Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager

Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The Chief Executive provided an update on the huge success of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 and noted what a truly memorable week it was for Belfast. The Chief Executive and Members expressed their sincere thanks to those staff who organised, worked, volunteered and supported throughout the remarkable week. Members noted that a detailed internal debrief will take place in the coming months in advance of planning for hosting in 2027. The Chief Executive also referred to some requests received to consider hosting in future years and it was noted that this needs to be further explored in relation to resource requirements, budgetary constraints and following further discussions with partners. An update will be brought to a future meeting for Members to further consider.

A member also asked that the upcoming Christmas Market and the options to extend for 2026 is added to the agenda for the next Party Group Leaders meeting.

2. West Wellbeing

The Chief Executive welcomed Eilish Craig, Donal Shiels and Fiona Craig from West Wellbeing a Belfast based charity committed to improving access to high quality, free mental health support for children, young people and adults. Members were presented with an overview of the vision and the services provided by the Charity along with examples of the wider impacts for those individuals experiencing mental health difficulties, emotional distress or crisis. Members also noted the statistical information provided for those clients availing of services and those waiting to utilise services of the hub and the outcomes that were being achieved. The request for support was noted along with an outline of what funding would help to deliver. In relation to some queries by a Member on how the charity is currently funded clarity was provided.

Members thanked Eilish, Donal and Fiona for attending and for providing an overview of the excellent work being undertaken

The Director of Finance advised that the funding request would be brought to a future meeting of SP&R Committee for Members consideration.

3. Finance Update

The Director of Finance presented the Quarter 1 financial outturn for 2026/27 and outlined the income, expenditure and projected underspend for the period. He advised a report with the detail discussed will be brought to August SP&R outlining the Quarter 1 financial position for the Council.

The Director also highlighted the budgetary challenges that need to be considered for the remainder of 2026/27 and also for the estimate process for 2027/28.

The Director also updated Members on 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 a report would be brought to August SP&R Committee for Members to further consider.

4. Area-based Community Planning

The Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty provided an update on the next stage of the process in relation to the development of area-based community plans. Members noted that an officer panel has now reviewed the submissions received in order to ensure compliance

with guidance issued including the requirement that the submissions have been prepared with input from a wider local community-based consortia. The Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty outlined the Officer recommendations following assessment and Members noted the clarification that was being sought in relation to a submission and the reasons for that clarification. The details of the submissions discussed will be included in a report to August SP&R Committee for Members approval.

Members also noted that officers have proactively been engaging with NICS departments to actively explore opportunities to lever additional funding into supporting this process. He advised that some additional funding had been secured from DfC the detail of which will also be included in the report to August SP&R Committee.

5. Local Development Plan

The Acting Planning Manager (Development Planning & Policy) provided an update on the review ongoing of the council's Local Development Plan in line with new policies and assessment criteria emerging.

Members noted that the Local Policies Plan introduces new assessment criteria for Houses in Multiple Occupation, which are expected to increase the planning requirements for developers seeking approval. In addition, draft guidance on Short-Term Lets has been agreed by the Planning Committee for public consultation and is scheduled to be launched in September 2026. An update on wastewater infrastructure phased approach and the engagement undertaken with statutory agencies was also noted.

An updated Local Development Plan timetable has been drafted and will be considered by the September Planning Committee. The Director of Planning and Building Control advised that Members could contact the team in advance of this meeting should they want to further discuss in order that the consultation process can move forward in September.

The Director also referred to correspondence from NI Water in relation to upcoming maintenance of Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works and the impact of this closure for future planning applications. The Director to circulate the map discussed to Members following the meeting.

6. Scottish Cities Alliance / Devolved Nations

The Director of City Regeneration & Development provided a briefing following Member and Officer attendance at a devolution-focused roundtable with city leaders from Scotland and Wales convened by the Scottish Cities Alliance. The purpose of which was to discuss evolving city-regional governance and devolution arrangements across the UK. Members noted the update and key next steps, the detail of which will be included in a report to August SP&R Committee. The Director also provided an update on the Belfast Regeneration Place Based Growth Proposition and the ongoing strategic engagement which is taking place with UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive including a forthcoming event in Westminster, the detail of which will also be included in the August SP&R Committee report. The Chief Executive said that further engagement would also take place with a view to maximising and consolidating investment at the city and city region level building on the progress made by the Belfast Region City Deal partnership to date.

7. Planning Update

The Director of Planning and Building Control updated the Forum on a number of planning matters which were currently live.

Members discussed the proposed communication process for updating Members and the Public in relation to planning enforcement. The Director also outlined the current number of enforcement cases pending and the measures that were being considered in order to address.

8. Illuminate Requests

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

- **35th anniversary of the Independence Day of Ukraine** - 24 August 2026
- **Childhood Cancer Awareness** - 1 September 2026
- **Palliative Care Week 2026** - 6 September 2026
- **90th Anniversary of Nettlefield Primary** - 9 September 2026
- **Organ Donation Week** - 21 September 2026
- **National Day of Spain** - 12 October 2026
- **Black History Month** - 16 October 2026
- **Domestic Abuse Awareness Week 2026** - 19 October 2026

- **COVID-19 Day of Reflection** - 14 March 2027

There was no consensus on a further request outlined and therefore it was agreed it would be brought to August SP&R Committee for consideration.

9. AOB

SEUPB Funding

The Senior Programme Delivery Manager, Property and Projects briefed Members on an emerging issue in relation to SEUPB funding and the proposal to submit a bid for additional funding. Members raised a number of concerns in relation to the request being made by SEUPB, including the very imminent deadline for an application to be made. The Senior Programme Delivery Manager clarified that Council had no ability to impact the submission deadline nor the very restricted timescale in which the money could be spent, running to just 2 months in total. This significantly curtailed the selection of suitable projects. It was noted that the submission deadline fell in advance of August SP&R. The Senior Programme Delivery Manager agreed to follow up with the various organisations involved and that a report would be brought to August SP&R Committee. The point was made that, if no other options are available, it may be necessary for officers to make a submission in advance of committee subject to committee approval.

Belfast Child Strategy

It was noted that representatives from the Belfast Area Outcomes Group be invited to present on the Belfast Child Strategy at the September meeting.

Cathedral Quarter BID

The Chief Executive referred to correspondence received from the Cathedral Quarter BID Manager, following discussion the Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty to follow up and an update brought back to PGL's in due course.

Abandoned E bikes

The Chief Executive advised that there had been a number of reports received during the week of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann about abandoned Hopp E bikes which are operated by a private operator. Members advised that this was an ongoing issue in the city and following

discussion it was noted that Officers further explore those issues raised and a report is brought back to the forum in due course.

Local Growth Fund

The Director of City Regeneration & Development provided a summary update on the Local Growth Fund, the ongoing engagement that has been taking place with government departments in relation to future years' allocations, emerging criteria and processes, as well as potential for in year spend and the challenging timeframes with this. Members noted the potential proposals being considered for in-year allocation from the Department for Communities, with a focus on regenerating and bringing vacant and underused assets back into use, It was noted that a report would be brought to the August SP&R Committee. In relation to queries raised by Members specifically in relation to artist studio spaces the Director provided clarity and agreed to bring a report back to a future meeting.

Frank Carson

The Chief Executive referred to correspondence received in relation to the city marking Frank Carson's 100th Birthday. It was agreed that the Chief Executive further explore.