

Derry City and Strabane District Council

**Minutes of Meeting of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee (Open)
held in the Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday 6 November 2018 at 4.00 pm**

Present:- Councillor Hastings (in the Chair), Aldermen Hussey, Kerrigan, Ramsey and Thompson, Councillors Cooper, Duddy Fleming, Gallagher, Gardiner, M McHugh, McKeever, McKnight and Tierney.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive (Mr J Kelpie), Director of Health and Community (Mrs K McFarland), Lead Finance Officer (Mr A Dallas) Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer (Ms E Cavanagh), Strategic Business Manager (Mrs R Craig) and Committee Services Assistant (Ms N Meehan).

GSP153/18 Notice and Summons of Meeting

The Chief Executive read the Notice and Summons for the Meeting.

GSP154/18 Apologies

The Chief Executive completed the roll call and there were no apologies recorded.

GSP155/18 Declarations of Members' Interests

The Chief Executive declared an interest in Item 8 – Capital Projects Approval.

Alderman Thompson declared an interest in the following agenda items:

Item 8 – Capital Projects Approval

Item 13 – Strategic Growth Partnership and

Item 14 –North West Regional Development Group Minutes.

GSP156/18 Chairperson's Business

GSP156/18 Halloween Festival

The Chair commended citizens throughout the City and District on their exemplary conduct during the Halloween Festival.

GSP157/18 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Council's successful application through Ernact for the Tide Programme and the subsequent letter of offer which had been received. He said this would assist Council in moving forward in terms of cross border maritime development referring specifically to Greencastle, Dunree and Killybegs.

GSP157/18 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 2 October 2018

The Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 2 October 2018 (GSP143/18-GSP151/18) were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

GSP158/18 Matters Arising**GSP159/18 Six Month Financial Outturn**

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was for Members to consider and approve Council's 6 Month financial outturn and position at 30 September 2018.

He referred to the correspondence received from the Department for Communities outlined in Appendix 2 regarding the recent successful challenge by Mid-Ulster District Council against the Department for Communities concerning the application of the statutory formula for the distribution of Rates Support Grant which would result in a quarterly saving of £225k for Council.

He also referred to a number of severance applications received in June which would result in further significant savings towards the rates process.

Councillor Gallagher welcomed the successful challenge by Mid-Ulster Council against the Department's approach to calculating domestic rates highlighting the benefits to be derived from challenging Departmental decisions.

The Lead Finance Officer explained that the challenge lodged by Mid-Ulster District Council concerned the appropriate conversion factor to be applied for the purposes of calculating the distribution of Rates Support

Grant. It was against an interpretation of a wording. However, in regards to Derry City and Strabane District Council the legislation to lodge such a challenge did not exist. He stated that this was not a grant which was enshrined in legislation for Council to challenge.

In relation to the challenge by Mid-Ulster District Council, Councillor Tierney queried what impact if any, this would have on the following year's rates programme.

The Lead Finance Officer confirmed that this would affect the following year's programme. He stated that this was an extremely complex application formula and Mid-Ulster had succeeded in demonstrating that the rate should be based on an individual Council and not Northern Ireland as a whole or a Northern Ireland average. He stated that this was a positive outcome but it did mean that Council would have to wait each year to ascertain how its percentage saving was placed in terms of the NI average.

The Chief Executive advised that in relation to the parallel issue, whilst this was a re-collaboration of the formula which did have a positive outcome for Derry City and Strabane District Council, and had arisen due to ongoing cuts.

In relation to the formulation and Council's position in terms of the NI average, Councillor Tierney queried when this information would be made available given that it would impact on the rates process and the setting of the rate. He also queried what the NI average figure meant to Council financially in terms of the rates.

The Chief Executive advised that Council endeavoured each year to obtain as much information as possible regarding possible determinations on the rates and had made representations to the Permanent Secretary in this regard. He continued that based on calculations to date Council would be able to make an assessment for the following year. However, any variance e.g. proposed reductions, was not normally made known until the latter stages. He stated that Council would continue to make representations to Permanent Secretaries requesting that information regarding budgets and proposed cuts by central government be made available as soon as possible. He pointed out that consultations regarding the rates process would begin in the coming weeks.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Council approval be granted to the 6-month financial position and note the surplus of £587k generated for the first 6 months of the 2018/2019 financial year.

GSP160/18 Capital Projects

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to allocate funds towards a number of capital projects and other corporate priorities within Council's capital plan following consideration by the Capital Projects and Corporate Programme Planning Group held on 23 October 2018.

Councillor Cooper welcomed the report and the £49m spend on capital projects since the inception of Derry City and Strabane District Council. He stated that Sinn Fein, as the largest Party in Council, had always been ambitious in its approach which was reflected in the report. Whilst opposed by other Parties, Sinn Fein had supported a moderate increase in rates which facilitated development across the City and district. He welcomed developments in terms of the Glen Road Community Centre which was key and displayed a statement of intent that Council would not be disregarding this project. He stated that the Visit Derry and City Centre projects were most enlightening. He stated that the approach which had been adopted had been prudent and positive in terms of what had been achieved since the inception of Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Alderman Thompson welcomed the report and the additional funding which had been forthcoming to enable the completion of the various projects referred to in the programme of works and the project management support. He stated that the programme was substantial and was apparent throughout the Council district.

Councillor M McHugh acknowledged the ambition and the excellent works carried out by Council, some of which were nearing completion and others currently in the pipeline. He particularly welcomed the projects at Newtownstewart, Castlederg, Sion Mills Play Park and Ballyfattan Play Park. He said the programme reflected Council's commitment in terms of development for the rural area and displayed equality across the City and district.

Councillor Tierney welcomed the report and the investment of £49m in capital projects since the merger of Derry and Strabane Councils. He also

welcomed the previous speaker's comments that Council did deliver for all of its citizens across the City and district. He expressed concern at Councillor Cooper's comments that this extensive development was due to Sinn Fein's position on Council. He stated that all of the projects included in the programme had been agreed collectively at the Capital and Corporate Projects Planning Group on which there was cross-Party representation and whose recommendations were ultimately presented to the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee for approval. The process was carried out by Council collectively and not Sinn Fein individually.

Councillor Cooper denied that he had in anyway suggested that these were Sinn Fein promoted projects, having merely stated that since becoming the largest Party on Council they had agreed moderate rates increases which had enabled such projects to proceed.

Councillor Tierney said his Party would stand over its decision to oppose the previous year's proposed rates increases and would continue to do so.

Alderman Hussey commended the Lead Finance Officer on his report and Officers on the tremendous work being carried out throughout the Council district. He pointed out that not all of the Political Parties were represented on the Capital and Corporate Projects Planning Group. He enquired if it would be possible for non-Members to receive a copy of the Minutes of Meetings of the Group. He also welcomed the Magheramason Play Park, the Sion Mills Play Park and the continued improvements to Castle Park, Castlederg.

In response to Councillor Cooper's earlier comments regarding a lack of support from other Political Parties in respect of proposed rates increases, Councillor Gallagher stated that although he was not represented on the Capital and Corporate Projects Planning Group, he had lobbied for a number projects to be included in the programme of works as an elected Member representing his electoral area. He referred to difficulties which would arise if there was not a fair inclusion of projects across the City and district. He said it was a matter for elected Members to ensure that the electorate did not feel they were being unfairly treated by Council. He expressed concern at the delay in the Strabane Public Realm Scheme.

The Chief Executive referred to table five of the capital programme which provided an update in regards to the Strabane Public Realm Scheme.

In regards to the Minutes of the Working Group, the Chief Executive advised that the outcome of these meetings were presented as discussion papers to the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee where decisions in respect thereof were agreed.

Subsequently the Committee

- Recommended**
- (a) that Council approval be granted to the allocation of funds of £1.412m from Council's capital fund and in-year loan charge savings to progress the projects detailed in this report and a further sum of £480k from Council's remaining strategic loan charge provision towards Glenview Community Centre; and**
 - (b) that Directors are provided with delegated authority to progress these capital projects in line with the overall agreed budgets with all decisions to be recorded on the Register of Decisions.**

GSP161/18 Grantfinder Renewal

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval for the renewal of the licence for the Grantfinder funding information portal and database for internal use by Council staff and the purchase of licences for two Open 4 modules providing external access to residents, stakeholders, community groups and businesses in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area for a 3-year period to 2021.

Alderman Thompson referred to the success of this initiative in recent years.

In response to a query from Alderman Thompson regarding access for residents and stakeholders, the Lead Finance Officer advised that these groups would be made aware through Council's Community Services Officers who would use a range of methods to convey all of the necessary information.

Councillor McKnight said this was a vital service for community groups particularly in terms of ongoing cuts. She said it was understandable

that the Open4Business module had not been as well utilised as the Open4Communities module. However she welcomed Council's resolve to provide information to all those affected. She considered £23 for every £1 invested to be most encouraging and referred to the importance of retaining this service.

Councillor Gallagher queried if Council's decision not to renew the Open4Business licence would discriminate against local businesses who were some of the highest ratepayers in the District. He referred to the need to ensure that they were not being disadvantaged by such a decision.

The Lead Finance Officer stated that obviously the decision not to renew this Open4Business portal licence was based on usage figures obtained and any funding received by business organisations. He said that in order to ensure that local businesses were not disadvantaged, Officers from Business and Enterprise and Funding would continue to advise private businesses of possibilities through data bases and social media. He assured that Council would continue to review the situation and if the non-renewal of the Open4Business portal licence appeared to be causing a problem it would be possible to have the licence renewed.

The Chief Executive advised that comparisons were being drawn between the current system and the previous system. He stated that the business team had been augmented and were communicating with businesses across the Council area on possible opportunities and levels of contact had improved and increased considerable from previous methods. He confirmed that the situation would be kept under review and the decision not to renew the licence was reversible, if required.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Council approval be granted to the renewal of the corporate licence for the Grantfinder funding information portal and database for internal use by Council staff and the purchase of one licence for the Open4Community module, through a single tender action, providing external access to residents, stakeholders, community groups and businesses in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area for a 3-year period to October 2021 at a cost of £32,130.

GSP162/18 Pilot Council Assets Naming Policy

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' comments on and approval for the suspension of the pilot Council Assets Naming Policy pending the outcome of a review by the Working Group.

In response to a query from Councillor Gallagher, the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Office advised that at the Working Group Meeting she had presented an overview of the learning in terms of the consultation. She stated that in order to determine the workings of the policy it would probably be necessary to carry out an in-depth examination thereof.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Council will not consider applications for the (re)naming of Council facilities pending the outcome of the review of the pilot Council Assets Naming Policy by the Working Group.

GSP163/18 Annual Performance Report - Rural Need Update

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval for the inclusion of additional information relating to the Rural Need Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 in the Annual Performance Report 2017/18 (Appendix 3).

Alderman Hussey whilst welcoming the report, requested clarification of the impact process.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer stated that guidance had been issued to assist public authorities in understanding their statutory duties under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. She stated that in compliance with the Department's requirements, Council had introduced the rural needs impact assessment process set out in the guidance as part of its policy/service screening process. She stated that a summary of what had been carried out in recent months was attached as an appendix to the report. She outlined the stages in the impact assessment process and noted that from December onwards,

if a specific rural need was identified, this would be contained within section 4 of the Committee report template.

Councillor M McHugh welcomed the report. He referred to the possible need for specific training in some cases in order to ensure that rural needs are identified and addressed.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer advised that training would be rolled out. She stated that rural needs had always been an aspect of the decision making process however, Council's approach would now be formalised.

Councillor Gallagher queried the impact if Council was found not to have due regard to rural need.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer stated that the legislation did not provide for the application of sanctions however, there was potential for a Judicial Review.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Council approve the inclusion of additional information relating to the Rural Need Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 in the Annual Performance Report 2017/18 (Appendix 3).

GSP164/18 Strategic Growth Partnership - Carnegie UK Trust Embedding Wellbeing in NI Project

The Strategic Business Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to update Members on the participation of the DCSD Strategic Growth Partnership in the Carnegie UK Trust's '*Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland*' project.

The Committee noted the content of the report.

GSP165/18 Strategic Growth Partnership

The Strategic Business Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the most recent meeting of the Strategic Growth Partnership/Community Planning Partnership – held on Thursday 25 October 2018.

Members noted the content of the report.

GSP166/18 North West Regional Development Group Minutes

The Strategic Business Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the meetings of the North West Regional Development Group.

Members noted the content of the report.

The Meeting terminated at 5.00pm.

Signed: _____
Chair

Date: _____

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified