

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held in the Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday 4 February 2020 at 4.00 pm

Present:- Members of Committee – Alderman McCready (in the Chair); Aldermen Bresland, Guy and McClintock; Councillors Boyle, Cooper, Fleming, Harkin, McCloskey, McGuire, Mellon and Reilly.

Non-Members of Committee – Councillors Durkan, Farrell and McCann.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive (Mr J Kelpie), Lead Finance Officer (Mr A Dallas), Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer (Ms E Cavanagh), Lead Human Resources Officer (Mrs P Donnelly), Funding Manager (Mr R Osterhaus), Strategic Projects Officer (Mr C Doherty) and Committee Services Assistant (Ms N Meehan).

GSP25/20 Notice and Summons of Meeting

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

GSP26/20 Apologies

The Chief Executive completed the roll call and an apology was recorded from Councillor McKeever.

GSP27/20 Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Harkin declared an interest in Item 4 – Deputation – To receive Mr Reidy, Assistant General Secretary, ICTU.

GSP28/20 Deputation - To receive Mr Owen Reidy, Assistant General Secretary, ICTU Northern Ireland Committee to discuss the "Better Work Better Lives" Campaign (copy of policy document attached)

The Committee received Mr Reidy, General Secretary, ICTU. Mr Reidy thanked

Members and Officers for granting him an opportunity to address the Committee. He presented in detail the content of the policy document on the Trade Union Campaign for "Better Work Better Lives" which addressed the following areas:

Introduction

Executive Summary

Decent Work:

The Issue is Quality, not Quantity

Invest in Skills, Infrastructure and Services

Scrap the Public Sector Pay Cap

Policy Areas for Consideration

Conclusion

In conclusion Mr Reidy made specific reference to the following three major issues upon which the campaign was based:

- Low Pay and Insecure Work
- Decline in Public Sector Investment
- Ending the Public Sector Pay Cap

He then urged Council to pass a Motion to support the idea of a forum for social dialogue which would provide a mechanism through which the aims and objectives of the campaign could be progressed and delivered. Mr Reidy welcomed certain elements contained within the New Approach document referring specifically to civic engagement, co-design and a suggested end to zero hour contracts. He said that whilst he did not have all the answers he could provide some of the solutions but stated that working together was imperative in terms of making progress.

Members thanked Mr Reidy for his presentation.

Members then raised the following points:

- Expressed support for the majority of issues referred to in the policy document.

- Acknowledged that better paid jobs were closely aligned with the whole concept and need for university expansion.
- Referred to the need to ensure progress on the issues raised and Council's strategy in regards to the adoption of the living wage and the inclusion of social clauses.
- Considered the need for greater investment into public services as a major priority for the Minister for the Economy following the recently restored Executive at Stormont.
- Expressed support for the suggested establishment of a forum for social dialogue which would help to provide confidence in terms of forward planning.
- Endorsed the policy document in its wider perspective.
- Referred to a number of issues contained in the policy document which were central to the concerns of the wider Trade Union body e.g. childcare, social contracts particularly in regards to Derry in terms of addressing its legacy of poor investment and high levels of deprivation.
- Acknowledged the importance of a functioning Stormont in terms of addressing these issues.
- Referred to the opportunity for the labour movement to shape policy for society.
- Referred to certain aspects of the policy document which appeared to face opposition from the Executive and the controlling Parties at Stormont.
- Expressed concern at the apparent desire for the larger Political Parties to support large handouts to big corporations.
- Expressed concern at the familiar lazy narrative that the public sector was too big, a serious consequence of which was privatisation of vital public services in an effort to reduce the public sector. Increased poverty had resulted from the pursuit and implementation of such an ideology throughout the world.
- Referred to the recent strikes both locally and further afield in a necessary attempt to address the injustices imposed on public sector workers through budget cuts and the inequalities facing those at the forefront particularly in regards to health and education.
- Referred to efforts by Investment NI to bring better paid jobs to NI.

- Emphasised the need to address childcare issues which were preventing potential employees from taking up paid employment.

Councillor Cooper referred to the following issues which his Party felt must be progressed in terms of moving forward and which would assist in delivering the Campaign objectives:

1. The need for continued lobbying for an increase in the Block Grant which currently did not meet the needs of this Council area.
2. The need for independent fiscal powers and the ability to avail of regionally generated monies without which current austerity would continue.
3. Concern at the possible lack of access to the European Convention of Human Rights in regards to workers' rights as a result of Brexit.

Councillor Harkin suggested that the Committee endorse the "Better Work Better Lives" Campaign policy document in its entirety. He referred to the sizeable context of the document which he felt would benefit all members of society.

Mr Reidy referred to the importance of funding and the Block Grant. He explained that the whole philosophy in regards to the issue of funding from central government and the Block Grant differed in Northern Ireland from other areas. He pointed out that only two regions within the UK were financially self-sufficient, with all of the others being net recipients. It was a fact that wealth was created and generated in cities from which it was subsequently distributed. He pointed out that NI was unique given its history and the considerable amount of necessary remedial work. He referred to the political consensus regarding insufficient funding from Westminster for NI. He stated that it was not that the public sector was too large but merely that the private sector was too small. He referred to the need to work with government to increase productivity and build NI's role in terms of making it more productive

Mr Reidy referred to the crisis currently facing a local company amidst fears regarding the security of 66 jobs which reinforced the need to ensure secure contracts for employees and a decent living wage. He acknowledged elements of the New Deal New Approach document particularly in regards to workers' rights and promoting collective bargaining, an ethos which he suggested could be adopted by the

British government. He referred to the need to capitalise on this and ensure that government honoured its commitment. He reiterated the need to make NI more productive and to establish an industrial strategy and improve the situation by working collectively and collaboratively.

In response to a query from Councillor Reilly, Mr Reidy suggested that if required, he could prepare a formal wording which Council could adopt. However, it would be appropriate for Council to support a call for the establishment of a forum for inclusive and social dialogue.

Mr Reidy also pointed out that ICTU had prepared a specific Childcare Policy document and it was also its intention to produce a policy paper. He referred to the need for government spending on childcare to be redirected from subsidisation of childcare to supply and investment in childcare services. He continued that whilst female participation in the labour market had improved in recent years, there was still a large and persistent gap between men and women. It should be the aim of any government to enact policies to ensure that those wishing to partake in the labour market were enabled to do so.

Mr Reidy said it was necessary to ensure that a policy which sought to increase women's employment was not one that led to the continued creation of poor quality employment in the care sector. This obviously had important implications for gender equality within the labour market as the majority of childcare workers were female. He referred to the need for drastic improvement in the pay and conditions associated with childcare work. This would not only provide much needed value to this essential work but also recognise the skill and experience required of child care workers. He concluded that unionisation and collective bargaining or a system of sectoral agreements was needed in the childcare sector. This would provide a mechanism to professionalise the childcare workforce through the introduction of a skills and wage infrastructure that could improve job quality.

In response to a query from Councillor Harkin, the Chief Executive explained that any Motion approved by the Committee would be presented to the February Council Meeting, for adoption, if so agreed.

Councillor Harkin said he would be willing to draft a proposal for presentation to the February Council Meeting.

The Chief Executive undertook to discuss with Members the mechanism through which any proposal agreed by the Committee could be progressed.

GSP29/20 Request for Suspension of Standing Orders - Ulster University

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor Harkin proposed the suspension of standing orders to discuss a petition by the Derry University Group for the Stormont Executive to oppose a request from Ulster University for £126m.

Councillor Reilly pointed out that it would not be necessary to suspend standing orders as this could be considered as a matter arising from the previous Minutes of Committee.

Members agreed accordingly.

GSP30/20 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 7 January 2020

Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on 5 November 2019 (GSP1/20-GSP23/20) were signed by the Chairperson as correct.

GSP31/20 Options for University Provision in the North West (Ref GSP8/20)

Councillor Harkin referred to the outstanding recommendations which had been agreed at the previous Meeting of Committee. He expressed concern that Ulster University were now seeking a £126m bail out 'loan' from the Stormont Executive to address its £110m overspend in respect of the relocation of students from the Jordanstown Campus to central Belfast. This money would essentially be used to fund debt and would not create any additional student places in Northern Ireland. He stated that this was a "slap in the face" for the people of Derry who had long campaigned for the expansion of the Magee Campus and had been recently advised that there was no funding available for this project. As a result, thereof, The Derry University Group had launched an online petition to oppose the payment of this "bailout" by Stormont without the expansion of the Magee Campus. He urged that Council support

this petition. He continued that this money should not be granted unconditionally and UU should honour its longstanding commitment to Magee. He suggested that Council should feel outraged if the Executive agreed to provide this funding.

Councillor Reilly acknowledged the online petition and said his Party were conscious of the demand for changes in the way in which universities were funded. Currently student numbers were strictly regulated by the Department for Economy which dictated the size of the full-time undergraduate population. He referred to comments made by the Senior Economist at the previous Meeting of Committee regarding the need for the MaSN cap for the City to be removed, irrespective of who was responsible for delivering university provision in the City, because without this being removed there would not be any real growth. He referred to the need for the Executive to consider the removal of this cap with the beneficiaries being the people of this region.

Councillor Cooper agreed that changes to the MaSN cap were key in terms of delivering university provision in the City and region. He suggested that whilst petitions were helpful and would draw support, it was imperative that the incoming interim Vice Chancellor met with Council to address the major issues of concern in regards to the University's position and future proposals. He suggested that any formal course of action be deferred pending the outcome of such a Meeting.

Alderman McClintock expressed her support for such a Meeting to take place.

Councillor McCloskey said it would appear that plans to expand the Magee Campus were futile and there was no solid commitment from Ulster University in respect of any proposed expansion. She stated that whilst the proposed Medical School was a worthwhile proposal this was somewhat lacking in terms of the promises made by the University over the past twenty years. She referred to the need for Council to formalise its approach towards the University and issue an ultimatum. The failure of the University's relocation of Nursing and Allied Health Courses to the Magee Campus would be a clear indication of its lack of commitment to the City. She suggested that Council formally consider alternative options in partnership with civic and interested bodies regarding university provision in the City.

The Chief Executive advised Members that a letter had been sent inviting the incoming interim Vice Chancellor to meet with Council. A response had subsequently been received indicating that this would be treated as a priority by the interim Vice Chancellor following his appointment in March.

Councillor McCann said it was difficult to have confidence in the University given the ongoing bias and discrimination which it had directed at the City over the past sixty years. He said it was important that the interim Vice Chancellor was made aware of the sense of anger felt throughout the City at the University's lack of commitment to the Magee Campus.

Councillor Harkin said he felt it was important that Council emphasised the level of outrage felt throughout the City and expressed its support for the Derry University Group's online petition. He also expressed concern that the Department for Economy had recently indicated that the Business Case submitted in respect of the expansion of the Magee Campus was now obsolete and would have to be rewritten, which presented a major concern.

Councillor Cooper reiterated that from his Party's perspective it was imperative that the interim Vice Chancellor address Council at the earliest possible date to elaborate on the University's financial request to the Executive and the impact thereof on proposals in respect of the expansion of the Magee Campus. It would also be necessary to address with him the position in regards to the Business Case and the commitment from the Executive and Irish government.

Alderman McClintock said she understood the issue regarding the Business Case would be raised with the Minister for Economy the following day.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that in 2016 Council had undertaken and funded the Business Case in respect of the expansion of the Magee Campus which had proved a substantial piece of work and had presented the case for additional MaSN for the City. He stated that the principles set out in the Business Case were as relevant today as they had been when initially presented to the Department in 2016.

Subsequently, the Committee

Recommended (a) that a Meeting be arranged with Derry University Group, as soon as

possible, to discuss their proposals in respect of university provision in the City; and

(b) that Council call on the Stormont Executive not to agree to a request from Ulster University for a sum of £126m without any commitment being given in respect of the expansion of the Magee Campus.

GSP32/20 Emblems in the Workplace

The Chief Executive referred to the January Council Meeting when following a request from Councillor Gallagher, it was agreed that an update on the Emblems in the Workplace Policy would be presented to this Meeting. The Chief Executive invited the Lead Human Resources Officer to present a verbal report for Members' information.

The Lead Human Resources Officer pointed out that as outlined in a report previously presented to Committee, a number of options had been recommended in relation to this issue which had subsequently been actioned. She continued that a draft policy had been developed in relation to the issue. She stated that the policy had been screened and subsequently forwarded to the Equality Commission and Council's employment solicitors who were currently seeking the opinion of a Barrister. She concluded that the next steps would be considered upon receipt of advice and feedback from the Barrister.

Councillor Cooper pointed out that having received the views of the Equality Commission he understood that Council would proceed with its individual approach in regards to the Easter Lily and the Poppy.

In response to concerns expressed by Councillor Cooper at the delay in receiving the Barrister's opinion, the Lead Legal Services Officer undertook to advise Members upon receipt of advice from Council's external solicitors. He stated that no confirmation could be given until this advice had been received.

GSP33/20 Preparing the Peace Plus Programme - Council Response to SEUPB Stakeholder Engagement Survey (Draft 1 Response attached)

The Funding Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' views on the 1st Draft of Council's Corporate Response to SEUPB's consultation on the new PEACE Plus Programme 2021-2027.

Councillor Mellon sought clarification in respect of the new cross-border EU funding and work carried out in regards to the provision of new shared spaces and services and enquired as to the possibility of this being broken down within the peace programme.

In regards to the Thematic focus: Peace-building activities, Councillor Mellon referred to the issues of access to quality education and queried why this was ranked as 4 and not 7 given its relevance and the current focus on skills building within the Community Plan. She also queried if marginalisation through improved housing and services should not be scored as a higher priority than 5, given the economic impact thereof.

The Funding Manager pointed out that the new programme represented an exciting opportunity to continue to fund peace building interventions alongside activities which would help to make the region a more prosperous, healthier place to live through funding areas of mutual interest on a cross border basis

The Funding Manager explained that the focus and order or priority were agreed by SEUPB. He explained that housing was a significant and increasing issue particularly in regards to welfare reform and the possible implementation of the bedroom tax which would require continuous monitoring.

He further explained that building strong, resilient and cohesive communities was at the core of Council's vision and the community plan and these were the cornerstone of effective peace and reconciliation projects.

Continuing, he explained that the eligible criteria of recipients would probably remain unchanged. He acknowledged that some important issues did require change which he would be willing to include in Council's corporate response. He pointed out that education was similar to housing and had a significant budget allocation and it was a matter for Council to suggest any additional needs required in this area

in terms of receiving additional funding in terms of the overall needs of the area.

Councillor Mellon pointed out that statutory bodies were only responsible for the delivery of curriculum based education and not skills based education, which was becoming more apparent through modern living styles.

Subsequently, the Committee

Recommended that Council adopt the initial 1st draft corporate response to SEUPB's consultation on the new PEACE Plus Programme 2021-2027.

GSP34/20 Quarter Three Financial Outturn Update 2019/2020

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 Quarter 3 financial outturn and position at 31st December 2019.

Councillor Cooper welcomed the positive response received from the Finance Minister regarding a meeting to discuss the Rates Support Grant. He acknowledged that five of the other affected Councils had also expressed a willingness to be involved in this process. He stated that there was a clear line of attack in terms of the joint approach being adopted and looked forward to this being progressed.

The Committee

Recommended that approval be granted to the 9-month financial position and note the surplus of £214k generated for the first 9 months of the 2019/2020 financial year.

GSP35/20 Review of Equality Scheme and Disability Scheme for DCSDC

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 present for elected Members'

consideration a draft Equality Scheme 2020-2023 and a draft Disability Scheme 2020-2023.

Alderman McClintock expressed concern that the consultee list did not contain up-to-date contact details and requested that this be addressed prior to proceeding.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer referred to the challenge presented in terms of ensuring that the contact details contained in consultee lists were up-to-date. She requested that Members advise her of any anomalies identified in relation thereto.

Councillor Fleming welcomed the report and commended the work carried out by Officers in this regard. Whilst acknowledging the importance of good relations, he stated that from a Council perspective and in regards to Section 75 groups, equality must be a main focus.

In response to a query from Councillor Fleming regarding Council's Disability Action Policy, the Lead Human Resources Officer advised that a report updating Members thereon would be presented to the next Meeting of Committee.

The Committee

Recommended that approval is given to (i) The Equality Scheme 2020-2023 and (ii) The Disability Scheme 2020-2023.

GSP36/20 Review of Equality Action Plan and Disability action Plan for DCSDC

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 present Members with a revised draft Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan for Derry City and Strabane District Council in accordance with its duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act and Section 49 of the Disability Discrimination Order respectively.

The Committee

Recommended that approval is given for a 12-week consultation in relation to the following

documents (i) the draft Equality Action Plan 2020-2023 and (ii) the draft Disability Action Plan 2020-2023.

GSP37/20 Lighting of Council Facilities

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 elected Member approval for the draft Asset Illumination Policy.

In response to a query from Councillor Mellon, the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer explained that the policy did not prohibit Members to take forward Motions for Lighting of Council Facilities. However, in the past such requests had been progressed through the Mayor's Office.

The Committee

Recommended that the draft Asset Illumination Policy is approved.

GSP38/20 Application for Vesting Order - Lands at Foyle Port Lisahally

The Lead Legal Services Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He pointed out that the purpose of the report was to advise Members an Application by Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners to acquire by Vesting lands for development of the Harbour undertaking at Lisahally, Londonderry.

The Committee

Recommended that Council writes to the solicitors acting for LPHC advising them that Council will not be lodging any objection to the Application to Vest.

GSP39/20 NILGA Update

The Chief Executive presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with copies of the draft Minutes of the

Meeting of the Central/Local Government Political Partnership Forum held on Friday 27 September 2019 in Castlereagh and a pre-consultation notice on three planned NILGA consultations on Council-led reform, the £3.5bn shared prosperity fund and shared services.

Members noted the content of the report.

GSP40/20 Update on Progress with Actions arising from Motions

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 update Members on progress with actions arising from two specific motions to Council.

Members noted the content of the report.

GSP41/20 Northern Ireland Housing Council 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 provide Members with the most recent Housing Bulletin.

Members noted the content of the report.

The Meeting then went into Confidential Business

The Meeting terminated at 6.10 pm