

## **Derry City and Strabane District Council**

**Open Minutes of Business and Culture Committee Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Derry Road, Strabane on Tuesday 12 September 2017 at 4.00pm.**

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**Present:- Alderman Hussey (Deputy Chairperson); Aldermen R Hamilton, Ramsey and Warke, Councillor's Boyle, Cooper, Cusack, Fleming, McKnight, McMahan and Reilly.**

**In Attendance:- Director of Business and Culture (Mr S Gillespie), Head of Culture (Ms A McCarter), Head of Business (Mr K O'Connor), Legacy Officer (Mrs O McGillion) and Committee Services Assistant (Ms N Meehan).**

**Non-Committee Member: Alderman Devenney.**

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### **BC160/17 Notice and Summons for Meeting**

The Director of Business and Culture read the Notice and Summons for the meeting.

### **BC161/17 Member Attendance and Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Logue and McGuire.

### **BC162/17 Election of Acting Chairperson**

As the Chairperson Councillor Logue was not in attendance it was agreed that the Deputy Chairperson, Alderman Hussey be nominated to the position of Acting Chairperson for the duration of the Meeting.

### **BC163/17 Declarations of Members' Interests**

Alderman Ramsey, Councillors Boyle, McKnight and Reilly expressed an interest in Item 20 – Peace IV Tenders – as members of the Peace IV Forum.

### **BC164/17 Deputations**

There were no deputations.

## **Open for Decision**

### **BC165/17 Chairperson's Business**

The Acting Chairperson commended the leading role adopted by Council Officers during the recent flooding. He sought a brief update from the Director of Business and Culture on the position to date.

The Director of Business and Culture stated that his Department were involved in all aspects relating to the flooding response. He stated that he had attended meetings with statutory agencies and the Senior Leadership Team to address all of the issues which had arisen. He stated that all senior staff had been involved in operating the two incident centres at Eglinton and the YMCA premises at Drumahoe for an initial ten day period including the bank holiday and beyond. He stated that the shifts at the centre operated from 8 am–2 pm and 3 pm –10 pm and were manned by senior staff.

The Director of Business and Culture advised that Officers had worked closely with the statutory agencies and the local community to ensure all issues could be dealt with as soon as possible. He stated that the centres had now returned to normal operations but that support would continue and queries would be dealt with for those affected. He stated that staff had worked additional hours and with a number having returned from holidays to cover the crisis

Members from all Parties commended the work carried out by Council officers and thanked them for their commitment.

A Member of the DUP grouping referred to a major problem which still existed at St Canice's Park and Dunverne Gardens in Eglinton regarding individuals who had been left homeless being rehoused. He expressed concern that the mobile homes which the Housing Executive had undertaken to provide to address the homelessness problem had not yet been delivered and enquired as to when it was anticipated these would be onsite. He also referred to a number of properties whose tenants did not have insurance which remained without electricity and heating. He also expressed concern that many would not be meeting with their insurance company representatives until the following weekend. He referred to the need for the process to be further advanced.

The Acting Chairperson explained that the siting of the mobile homes was a planning issue. He continued that planning was an autonomous body and suggested that the matter be raised at the next meeting of the Planning Committee.

An Independent Member of Council referred to a number of individuals who were still experiencing difficulties. He acknowledged that this was a long term situation and issues would continue to arise for a considerable period of time. He pointed out that the siting of the mobile homes would be addressed through the planning process. He urged Officers to take whatever action possible to advance the process.

The said Member expressed concern that a yellow warning had been issued in respect of that day's weather and he understood that Council and the various agencies had been proactive in ensuring that the most vulnerable were prepared and commended them on their hard work and efforts in this regard.

A Member of the Sinn Fein grouping said there was a genuine feeling that Council staff and the voluntary agencies together with the community and voluntary sectors had acted beyond the call of duty in responding to the devastation caused. He stated that the impact of the floods would have a long-term impact.

A Member of the DUP grouping expressed concern at the delay in meeting those whose business had been damaged during the flooding. He understood a Meeting had been arranged for the following day three weeks following the floods.

The Head of Business advised that the Business Team had been in contact with a number of businesses two weeks previously including Glendermott Valley Business Park and discussions were ongoing. He advised that the purpose of the following days meeting was to update businesses regarding ongoing discussions with LPS regarding rates relief and offer assistance in terms of completing applications forms. He acknowledged that there may be a number of businesses who had not been contactable however every effort had been made to communicate with those affected.

The Head of Business advised that the Business Team had compiled a list of available properties which businesses could avail of. He acknowledged that a number of businesses were localised and would not wish to relocate outside their area. This was a matter for individual

businesses to address. He also referred to difficulties which might arise with landlords when endeavouring to agree a short-term lease.

**BC166/17 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Business and Culture Committee held on Tuesday 4 July 2017**

The Open Minutes of the Business and Culture Committee Meeting held on 4 July 2017 (BC136/17-BC157/17) were agreed and signed by the Chairperson.

**BC167/17 Matters Arising**

**BC168/17 Off-Street Car Parking Management and Enforcement Arrangements (BC141/17)**

A Member of the Sinn Fein grouping referred to anti-social behaviour occurring at a car park in Dock Street, Strabane. He said this was a small car park which seldom opened in the evening. He requested that Officers investigate the situation with the possibility of having a padlock installed on the gates of the car park to prevent young people gaining access.

The Head of Business undertook to investigate the matter and report thereon in due course.

In response to a query from a Member of the SDLP grouping, the Head of Business stated that in relation to a specific query regarding anti-social behaviour the PSNI had no record of any such incidents in the car park at Spencer Road or in any of the City centre car parks. He stated that in relation to the provision of CCTV costings had been compiled and these would be presented to the October Meeting of the Committee in terms of value for money. He continued that this would prove an extremely expensive initiative and said he would be willing to explore any alternative measures which might be identified.

**BC169/17 Christmas 2017 – Programming and Marketing Development**

The Head of Culture 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 programming and marketing development for Christmas 2017.

A Member of the Sinn Fein grouping welcomed the programme of events. He welcomed the recommended £3,000 grant from the overall Christmas budget to be awarded to each of the five neighbourhood renewal areas. He stated that the Strabane Christmas fare had benefited from this the previous year and hopefully it would also benefit in 2017.

In response to a query from a Member of the Sinn Fein grouping the Head of Culture explained that discussions had taken place regarding the possibility of extending the Wonder Windows scheme to derelict properties in Strabane and this would be further considered. She stated that this had been advanced in the City through City Centre Initiative. She reiterated that discussions were ongoing regarding the possibility of reiterating this scheme in Strabane.

A Member of the SDLP grouping welcomed the extended Christmas Programme of Events.

The Acting Chairperson referred to the fact that the suggested grant of £1,000 to be given to communities in Castleberg, Newtownstewart and Sion Mills had been ongoing for some time and requested that this be reviewed and updated in compliance with other funding initiatives.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve the programming and marketing development for Christmas 2017 as outlined in the report.**

**BC170/17 Digital Government Conference 2017**

The Head of Business 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 sponsorship of the Agenda NI Digital Government Conference 2017.

In response to a query from a Member of the SDLP grouping the Head of Business advised that the general public could register for the Conference at Agenda NI's website. He stated that the Conference would attract people from outside the City and district and confirmed that accommodation providers throughout the City and district would benefit from the visitor numbers. In addition Agenda NI had booked

the City Hotel, the Guildhall and a local restaurant to stage events associated with the Conference for those attending.

A Member of the Sinn Fein grouping enquired if there were any plans to upgrade Council's online service and website.

The Head of Business advised that Council had established a Digital Customer Engagement Group to determine how Council could offer more services online. Council was also in the process of carrying out an audit and review to ascertain which services could be offered online. They would also be reviewing resources to in order to make this become a reality. He stated that a report thereon would be presented to the Committee prior to the end of the year.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve the sponsorship of the Digital Government Conference as outlined in Section 4.1.**

**BC171/17 FMF and Clipper 2017-2018 Stopover.**

The Head of Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to update Members regarding the planning and programme development for the Foyle Maritime Festival 2018 and seek approval for Officers to move forward with the procurement processes required.

Members welcomed the above report and raised the following points:

- Referred to the economic benefits the FMF and Clipper event brought to the City.
- Urged the private sector to become involved in the sponsorship of the event particularly given the benefits to be derived from visitor numbers to the City.
- Anticipated that this would become an annual event for the City.
- Referred to the fact that this was a well-established event in the City.
- In relation to the application to TNI for £190,000 and queried if this was potentially not what Council might expect to receive and would Council be expected to meet a possible shortfall?
- Referred to the possible financial implications for Council if the funding from TNI was not forthcoming.

- Expressed concern that TNI had funded other festivals of this scale across Northern Ireland.
- Expressed concern at the lack of certainty surrounding TNI's commitment for this flagship event for the City.
- Referred to the possibility of securing funding for Tourism Ireland given the clear cross benefits to be derived from this event.

The Head of Culture confirmed that there was a potential shortfall and Council was working closely with TNI and seeking alternative sponsorship. She stated that Officers were working hard to ensure that there would not be a shortfall bearing in mind the timelines provided by TNI. She said it was anticipated that the funding process would open in November 2017 following which a report updating Members on the position would be presented to a future Meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Culture confirmed that Council was working closely with Tourism Ireland in terms of marketing the festival however, they did not have a dedicated fund for events of this nature. They were working with the team in terms of marketing the festival.

In response to a query from a Member of the SDLP grouping, the Head of Culture confirmed that specific events programmes contained details of Councils entire programme of events.

In response to a query from the Acting Chairperson, the Head of Culture confirmed that other cities had staged the Clipper event in four consecutive years.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve programming, financial and procurement arrangements as set out above to facilitate the planning and programme development of the Foyle Maritime Festival 2018.**

**BC172/17 Sperrins Future Search Event: 'Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential' – Nomination of Two Members**

The Director of Business and Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose

of the report was to select two Members to represent Derry City and Strabane District Council at the Sperrins Future Search event. The event was scheduled to take place from 10.30 am on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017 until 2.00 pm on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2017. The venue was Glenavon House Hotel, Glenavon.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **that the Deputy Chairperson, Alderman Hussey and Councillor McGuire be nominated to represent Council at the Sperrins Future Search event as outlined above.**

**BC173/17    Pedal Perks**

The Director of Business and Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to inform Members' of a new cyclist loyalty scheme planned to be launched Council-wide in September 2017.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members endorse and help to promote the above scheme.**

**BC174/17 European Capital of Culture 2023 (ECoC)**

The Director of Legacy 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 development of the joint bid with Belfast City Council to become European Capital of Culture 2023.

The Director of Legacy then drew attention to the following issues:

- The team had now engaged with seven and a half thousand people and it was anticipated that it would meet its 10,000 target by 27 October 2017.
- Business engagement events had been planned for 29 October in both Belfast and Derry.
- It was anticipated that all citizens would become involved in the next stage of engagement and the bid process.
- There were a number of digital platforms.
- Encouraged Members to communicate the message through social media platforms.
- Advised that stage two was critical because at that stage there would be little room for manoeuvre.
- The risks involved were being constantly reviewed and a report thereon would be presented to Member when available.
- Advised that the Capital and Corporate Working Group would provide an update the following day with an outline of the final bid being presented to a Special Meeting of the Committee scheduled for 22 September 2017.

Members then raised the following points:

- Congratulated the team involved in getting to this stage.
- Suggested replicating the approach adopted during the 2013 City of Culture bid which had proved in terms of those areas who did not usually engage in cultural activity.
- Confident that sufficient work had been carried out to progress to stage two.

- Referred to the need to exercise caution when discussing the bid given that any disclosure could compromise the unique bidding position.
- Referred to the provisional budget of £51 million which it was felt was favourable given the £26 million spent on the City of Culture in 2013.
- Commended the Director of Legacy and her team on their hard work and efforts in reaching this stage.
- Supported the approach being adopted in involving the general public and allowing them to design and establish the bid. Acknowledged from 2013 City of Culture bid that public participation delivered the best outcome.
- Looked forward to the Special Meeting scheduled for September 22 when an outline of the final bid would be presented.
- Acknowledged the clear partnership approach in delivering the final bid.

In response to a query from a Member of the DUP grouping, the Director of Legacy advised that engagement had taken place with all age groups including senior citizens and young children. The team had also engaged with students from the North West College and the University of Ulster and Section 75 groups. All networks were being used in an effort to get the information into the public domain.

In response to a query from the Acting Chairperson, the Director of Legacy explained the work in respect of the bid was being carried out jointly in partnership with Belfast City Council however the title would be awarded to one City.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members note the developments of the joint bid to become European Capital of Culture 2023 and agreed to participate in the Elected Members Workshop on 12<sup>th</sup> September.**

**BC175/17 Vacancy Report on Commercial Properties**

The Head of Business 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 an update on the current vacancies within Derry City Centre.

Members raised the following points:

- Whilst acknowledging changes in purchasing trends expressed concern that the empty business rates relief presented a more important issue for people setting up a business.
- Expressed concern that the empty business rates relief scheme had been suspended most probably due to the fact that the Executive at Stormont was currently not operating.
- Suggested writing to the Senior Civil Servant requesting that the empty business rates relief scheme be extended.

The Head of Business referred to the need for work to be carried out in relation to the non-domestic rates policy. He stated that Council areas which had higher levels of deprivation were unfairly disadvantaged. He referred to the need to examine how Council could influence policy in order to help alleviate the problem.

The following points were raised by Members:

- Pointed out that the empty business rates relief scheme had ceased to exist prior to the collapse of the Stormont Executive.
- Referred to the excellent work carried out by the former Finance Minister in relation to rates relief and suggested that his proposals be re-examined in terms of moving forward and progressing this issue.
- Referred to the major success of initiatives adopted by traders in the Waterloo Street area.
- Referred to a number of organisations set up to offer technical advice and assistance to local traders.
- Acknowledged that many traders did not possess the necessary technical expertise and referred to the need to encourage local traders to develop online strategies.
- Referred to the fact that some local traders were receiving 70%-80% income from online trading.
- Referred to a number of groups who could be exploited in the pursuit of the required techniques and technical expertise to ensure successful online trading.
- Confident that the necessary building blocks were in place to achieve success and it was now necessary to spread awareness amongst local traders.

- Advised that civil servants could continue to progress the far reaching proposals established by the former Finance Minister in relation to rates relief.
- Enquired if there were similar initiatives for Strabane traders?
- Enquired if this initiative could be extended to businesses in the rural area?
- Referred to the fact that the best initiative would be for the Stormont Executive to be back in operation.
- Referred to the fact that there had been a 30% increase in tourism and markets which could be contributed to online business.
- Referred to the fact that a lot of businesses operated from home and marketing their business presented a major issue.
- Local markets were a major tourist attraction.

The Head of Business referred to an audit and a survey carried out by CCI and inspections carried out in Strabane. He stated that the initiatives were district wide and were not specific to location and were available to all businesses. Advised that these initiatives were available throughout the Council area and district.

Subsequently the Committee

- Recommended**
- (a) that Members noted the contents of the report and give approval for Officers to further scope out the development of the City Start Up Programme with Belfast City Council;**
  - (b) that Council write to the Senior Civil Servant in the Department of Finance requesting (i) an extension of the empty rooms rates relief scheme and investigate if there area any other schemes available which would improve investment in the City and District; and (ii) investigate the possibility of progressing proposals put forward by the former Minister for Finance in relation to Rates Relief.**

**BC176/17 Annual Translational Medicine Conference**

The Head of Business presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was to inform Members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Translational Medicine (TMED8) Conference taking place on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> September 2017, City Hotel, Derry-Londonderry and make Members aware of the support provided for TMED8 by Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Members noted the content of the above report.

**BC177/17 Archaeology Day**

The Head of Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to inform Members about this year's Archaeology Day which took place on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 in the Tower Museum.

Members noted the content of the above report.

**BC178/17 East Coast USA Trade and Investment Mission Update**

The Head of Business 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 an update of planning and preparations for an East Coast USA Trade and Investment Mission in November 2017.

Members noted the content of the above report.

**BC179/17 Guildhall Organ Festival**

The Head of Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to highlight the upcoming Organ Festival to be held in the Guildhall from 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> October. The event is an opportunity to further promote the Guildhall and organ to both local communities and visitors to the city and district.

Members noted the content of the above report.

**BC180/17 Guildhall Craft Fair**

The Head of Culture presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. She stated that the purpose of the report was to update Members on the status of the Guildhall Craft Fair 2017.

Members noted the content of the above report.

**BC181/17 Peace IV Tenders**

The Head of Business presented the above report a copy of which had previously been circulated. He stated that the purpose of the report was to inform Members of the tender process for three tenders which have been approved by delegated authority in August as part of the implementation of the Peace IV Local Action Plan.

Members noted the content of the above report.

The Meeting went into confidential business.

**The Meeting terminated at 5.55pm**