

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

**Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 7 November 2017 at 4.00 pm.**

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**Present: - Councillor Fleming (in the Chair), Alderman Hussey, Kerrigan, Ramsey, and Thompson. Councillors Boyle, Cooper, Donnelly, C Kelly, McKeever, McKnight, McMahan, Robinson and Tierney.**

**In Attendance:- Director of Health and Community (Mrs K McFarland), Director of Environment and Regeneration (Mrs K Phillips), Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer (Ms E Cavanagh), Business Support and Change Manager (Mrs R Craig), Lead Human Resources officer (Ms P Donnelly), Human resources Officer (Mary McLaughlin) and Committee Services Assistants (Ms N Meehan and Miss L Bell).**

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### **GSP152/17 Notice and Summons for Meeting**

The Director of Health and Community read the Notice and Summons for the Meeting.

### **GSP153/17 Member attendance and apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **GSP154/17 Declarations of Members' interests**

The Chairperson, Councillor Fleming declared an interest in item 14 as a member of the North West Regional Development Group.

### **Chairperson Business**

### **GSP155/17 Congratulations**

The Chairperson congratulated and commended those Council staff involved on the huge success of the Halloween event. He stated that this was a premier event and was enjoyed by locals and visitors to the City alike.

Alderman Hussey concurred with the Chairperson's comments regarding the success of the Halloween event. He expressed concern

however at a bonfire which had taken place in Strabane at Halloween when flags were burned and he anticipated that Council would express its condemnation of this activity.

### **GSP156/17 Condemnation**

The Chairperson condemned the unfortunate tragedies which had taken place in the City in recent weeks including an attack on a man in the City centre the previous weekend. He stated that all Political Parties were working together to ensure that the City centre became a safer environment.

### **GSP157/17 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service – Proposed Budget Cuts**

The Chairperson referred to correspondence which had been received by the Chief Executive from the Secretary, Derry Trades Union Council which read as follows:

‘At our meeting last night, Thursday 2 November 2017, the Northern Ireland Fire Service made representation to the Derry Trades Union Council. This was in relation to their serious concern that the budget cuts being imposed on the Fire Service will seriously impact on the local service capacity to provide cover in terms of personnel and specialised equipment in particular aerial appliance and water rescue.

There needs to be an urgent review carried out by Derry City and Strabane District Council of the current staffing level and availability of specialised equipment available in Western area to respond to emergencies.

Derry Trades Union Council will be campaigning and lobbying as a matter of urgency to highlight these issues and we will fully support our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Fire Service.’

Councillor McKeever referred to the seriousness of the situation which he said presented a major public risk. He advised that the Fire Service Board were responsible for assessing requirements for the whole of Northern Ireland in terms of vehicles and crews. He acknowledged the budgetary limitations however he stressed that any reduction in such a vital services was unjustifiable and would create unnecessary risk. He suggested that the situation be addressed as a matter of urgency. He advised that he would be submitting a Motion to the November Council Meeting on the matter and referred to the need for all efforts

to be made to have the decision to enforce budgetary cuts reversed. He reiterated his concerns regarding the impact of any such cuts on the service and the potential risks arising therefrom.

Councillor McMahon concurred with the comments expressed. He advised that the previous weekend he had spoken to a local Fire Fighter who serviced both the Derry and Strabane areas and who had expressed his fears regarding the proposed cuts. He referred to the need to establish if these cuts were being imposed throughout the entire Fire Service including Belfast.

Alderman Hussey referred to discussions he had with senior personnel from the Fire and Rescue Service who had expressed serious concerns with regard to maintaining recruitment levels particularly in rural Fire Stations e.g. Strabane, Newtownstewart and Castlederg. He continued recruitment had not taken place in Castlederg for a considerable period and given the ageing workforce there would be a noticeable reduction in human resources in the near future. He referred to the need for Council to engage with the Fire and Rescue Service in order to establish the current situation and to strongly oppose the proposed cuts. He stated that this Council district warranted the same service as was available elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Donnelly expressed shock that cuts were being imposed which could lead to the withdrawal of the service in some areas particularly given the recent Grenfell fire and the horrendous impact thereof. He further referred to the number of drowning tragedies which had occurred in the City during the past year and stated that in recent weeks a number of members of the public had been assisted by Fire and Rescue Services which had a positive outcome. He stressed that any reduction in the service could ultimately lead to a loss of life.

Alderman Kerrigan referred to serious efforts in Strabane to retain appliances. He referred to the importance of all of the emergency services and to the need to ensure that there was no reduction in the provision of services particularly in the rural area.

Alderman Devenney stated that Council must address this serious issue and endeavour to ensure the retention of adequate staffing levels and the availability of specialised equipment necessary to prevent any reduction in the provision of this crucial service. He referred to the need for Council to challenge any apparent East/West divide. He

concluded that any reduction in this service could have a fatalistic outcome.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended that Council write (a) to the Head Civil Servant DHC expressing concern at the proposed cuts and stressing that these cuts should not be allowed to be implemented; and (b) to NIFRS (i) requesting a review of its decision regarding the cuts and asking that Council be given an insight into current staffing levels; and (ii) inviting a senior member of staff to address Committee on the level of cuts in this Council area and the potential risks arising therefrom.**

## **Open for Decision**

### **GSP158/17 Minutes**

The open minutes of Meeting held on 3 October 2017 (GSP137/17-GSP147/17) were confirmed and signed by the chairperson.

Councillor Cooper referred to comments he made during discussion on Minute GSP144/17 and said he felt he had been misquoted in that he had actually referred to other strategic plans for the City and region and in particular the development of the A5/A6. He anticipated that the Growth Deal would not delay this process. He hoped that the development of the Growth Deal would not be used as a means to delay the process. He concluded that whilst Sinn Fein agreed with the development of the Growth Deal it was anticipated that this would not affect Council's cross border commitments.

### **GSP159/17 Strategic Growth Plan**

The Business Support and Change Manager presented the above report a copy of which had been previously circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to inform the members that the Strategic Growth Partnership/Community planning partnership had approved their Strategic Growth partnership/Community plan at its meeting held on the 19 October 2017.

The Marketing Assistant delivered a power-point presentation on the Strategic Growth Plan and the marketing activities which had been adopted in relation thereto.

Members commended Officers on the content of the presentation and on the positive focus of the Plan.

Councillor Cooper stated that the Plan would raise expectations to a greater level for citizens of the City and district and target a larger audience. He referred to a possible issue in respect of the delivery of the plan in terms of the partners involved and the reality of delivering on such ambitious targets. He stated that focus on delivery was key to the success of the Plan. He referred to the importance of better employment opportunities for young people and referred to scheduled meetings with representatives from the University of Ulster to discuss long-term growth plans and to ensure that the best courses were being made available. He referred to the need to lobby strongly to ensure that the necessary resources were in place to ensure a successful outcome.

Councillor Cooper referred to Council's progress to-date in relation to the Strategic Growth Plan and the local development plan. He reiterated the need for all of the partners involved to prioritise and commit to the successful delivery of the plan and the targets contained therein. He stated that Council had adopted a holistic approach in its communications regarding the Plan and reiterated the significance of the University of Ulster in ensuring a successful outcome.

Councillor Tierney stated that the Plan highlighted the many wonderful aspects of the City. He stated that his Party had always supported the Community Planning process and the Strategic Growth Plan and anticipated the successful delivery of the Plan. He queried what impact a possible return to Direct Rule would have on the delivery of the Strategic Growth Plan stating that he would have little faith in a Conservative government prioritising or assisting in the delivery of a Plan for the City and district.

Alderman Hussey expressed concern at the previous speaker's specific reference to the City in relation to the Strategic Growth Plan given that this was to reflect the entire City and district. He also expressed concern at elements of the video which concentrated on representation from one sector of the community to the exclusion of others. He queried the lack of representation from the Unionist community and

referred to the need for a balanced approach. He concluded that the Strategic Growth Plan was excellent however it must deliver for all.

Councillor McMahon regarded the previous speaker's comments in relation to alleged exclusion as negative and unnecessary.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended that the Committee endorse the final plan and note the arrangements to launch the plan in November.**

### **GSP160/17 Rescheduling Committee Dates**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report a copy of which had been previously circulated. She advised that the purpose of this report was to seek members' views on and obtain agreement to the potential rescheduling of week 1 and 2 Council Committees in January 2018, to weeks 2 and 3 respectively.

The committee

**Recommended that the committee reschedule the following January Committee meetings:**

- **Governance & Strategic planning Committee from Tuesday 2 January to Tuesday 9 January 2018.**
- **Planning Committee from Wednesday 3 January to Wednesday 10 January 2018.**
- **Assurance, Audit & Risk Committee from Thursday 4 January to Thursday 11 January 2018.**
- **Business and Culture Committee from Tuesday 9 January to Tuesday 16 January 2018.**
- **Environment and regeneration Committee from Wednesday 10 January to Wednesday 17 January 2017.**
- **Health and Community Committee from Thursday 11 January to Thursday 18 January 2018.**

## **GSP161/17 Mental Health Charter**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report the copy of which had been previously circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to present for consideration and seek for approval for Council to become a signatory of the Mental Health Charter.

Members from all Parties welcomed this initiative.

Councillor McKnight welcomed the initiative particularly given that the highest percentage of Council's absenteeism figures related to mental health issues. She stated that this in conjunction with the Be Well Initiative showed that Council was a caring employer. She urged employers throughout the City and district to undertake similar initiatives for the wellbeing of their employees. Such initiatives could be key to reducing the number of people suffering from mental health problems in the Council area.

Alderman Hussey referred to the fact that in many areas employers tended to overlook the effects of mental health issues on their employees.

Councillor Boyle stated that this initiative provided Council with an opportunity to promote better wellbeing throughout its workforce and to tackle issues associated with mental health. This would ultimately lead to the enhancement of the service provided by Council.

The Committee

**Recommended that the committee approve the proposal to become a signatory of the Mental Health Charter.**

## **GSP162/17 Budget Virement**

The lead democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report which had been previously circulated. She stated that the purpose of the report was to seek members' permission to transfer budgets within the Democratic Services and Improvement Unit for 2017/18.

The committee

**Recommended that 30K of existing budgets are vired to allow for the unbudgeted items of expenditure in section 3 of the report to be purchased within the financial year 2017/18.**

### **GSP163/17 Six Month Financial Outturn 2017/18**

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report which had previously been circulated. He stated that the purpose of this report was for Members to consider and approve Council's 6 month financial outturn and position at 30 September 2017.

Members commended the Lead Finance Officer and his team in identifying the £811k savings.

Councillor McMahon referred to the 4% cut in the Rates Support Grant and expressed concern that the seven Councils affected had been denied their request for an urgent meeting to discuss the impact of the cuts. He stated that regardless of the ongoing situation at Stormont, Civil Servants should not be allowed to ignore such requests. He stated that without the necessary representations being made these cuts would be implemented which would impact negatively on the livelihood of the citizens of the City and district.

Councillor Boyle stated that this was a matter of considerable concern given the cumulative and negative impact of the proposed 4, 8 and 12 per cent cuts over the next four years on Council. He stated that these cuts would be felt greatest within local communities. He said it was a matter of grave concern that Civil Servants had ignored the request from the seven impacted Councils to meet to discuss the situation. He stated however that had it not been for the current political impasse such a situation would not have arisen and as such appealed to those involved to work toward reaching an agreement in order that executive powers could be restored for the benefit of Northern Ireland and in particular the City and district.

Alderman Hussey concurred with the previous speaker's comments. He said it was disgraceful that Civil Servants were refusing to meet with democratically elected representatives who were endeavouring to continue to carry out their duties. However being in opposition to government was not entirely unique.

Council Cooper suggested a collective approach in going forward and referred to the possibility of preparing a joint lobby with the six other Councils affected. He referred to the need for any such lobby to be as robust as possible.

In response to a query from Alderman Thompson, the Lead Finance Officer advised that a letter had been prepared for despatch to the Secretary of State he was however awaiting Members' comments in relation thereto. He continued that any correspondence would be on behalf of and endorsed by all seven Councils affected.

Councillor Boyle stated that this Council represented the second City in the North of Ireland and this should be reflected in any cuts to the Rates Support Grant.

Councillor Donnelly referred to the need for robust action by Council in opposition to these cuts.

Alderman Hussey referred to Council's investment in the European Capital of Culture and expressed concern at recent media reports regarding the application submitted by Belfast City council which did not mention the wording submitted on Council's behalf as partners in this bid. He requested that Members be provided with the entire wording of the completed application which had been submitted.

Councillor Cooper expressed concern that as the application submitted was currently at stage one of the bid process any proposal to provide information may compromise the confidential nature of the bid.

Alderman Hussey assured that such information would be sought in confidential business.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended**      **(a) that Council write to the Secretary of State requesting a meeting to discuss the impact of the proposed cut to the Rates Support Grant and Members concerns regarding refusal by Civil Servants to meet with those seven Councils affected by the cuts; and**

**(b) that the Committee notes the surplus of £811k generated for the first 6 months of the 2017/18 financial year and approves the 6 month financial position.**

**GSP164/17 The Absence Management Update 1 November 2017**

The Lead Human Resources Officer presented the above report which was previously circulated. She stated that the purpose of this report was to provide members with an update on progress in relation to Absence Management for the 6 month period April 2017 to September 2017.

The Human Resources Officer delivered a power point presentation on the Be Well Health and Well Being Journey.

Members thanked the Human Resources Officer for the presentation and commended her on its content.

The Lead Human Resources Officer advised that since the inception of Derry City and Strabane District Council there had been a 1.8% reduction in the figures relating to absence management.

Members congratulated the Human Resources Officer and her team on their achievements.

Alderman Hussey commended Human Resources staff on the Be Well programme which he found extremely beneficial and which provided a wonderful mechanism for engaging with Council staff.

The Committee

**Recommended that the committee notes the information presented and endorses the approach outlined to continue to manage absence.**

**Open for information**

**GSP165/17 North West Regional Development Group**

The Business Support and Change Manager presented the above report which was previously circulated. She stated that the purpose of this report was to provide members with copies of the minutes of meetings of the North West Regional Development Group.

Members noted the content of the report.

**GSP166/17 Performance improvement Duty**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report which was previously circulated. She stated that the purpose of this report was to advise members of activity related to the implementation of the council's Performance improvement Duty.

Members noted the content of the report.

The Meeting terminated at 5.35 pm