

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Open Minutes of Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday 5 February 2019 at 4.00 pm.

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

Non-Members of Committee – Councillors Carr, Donnelly, P Kelly and Robinson.

In Attendance: Chief Executive (Mr J Kelpie), Lead Human Resources Officer (Mrs P Donnelly), Lead Assurance Officer (Mrs D McDonnell), Lead Legal Services Officer (Mr P Kingston), Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer (Ms E Cavanagh) and Committee Services Assistant (Mrs T Johnstone).

GSP12/19 Notice and Summons for Meeting

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

GSP13/19 Members Attendance and Apologies

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

GSP14/19 Declarations of Members' Interests

Alderman Hussey declared an interest in agenda item 8 - Governance Arrangements.

Open for Decision

Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

GSP15/19 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee Held on Tuesday 8 January 2019

The Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 8 January 2019 (GSP1/19-GSP10/19) were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

GSP16/19 BREXIT – Day One Readiness

The Lead Assurance 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 an update in relation to the ongoing work that is being carried out by Councils to ensure Day One Readiness in the event of a No-Deal Brexit in relation to Council services; and to seek Member's comments in relation to the risk categories currently being considered.

Councillor P Kelly queried the level of information sharing from central government departments in relation to Brexit. He referred to the key issues within the report and queried if Council still purchased fuel from Donegal. He stated that in the Legacy Strabane District Council the majority of fuel was purchased in Donegal which was cost effective at that time.

In response, the Lead Assurance Officer stated that work was ongoing with the central government departments in relation to the sharing of plans which is currently in the early stages but a framework had been set up for Council to access information and vice versa. She advised that all of Council's fuel purchased in the North.

In addition, the Chief Executive confirmed that fuel was purchased in Donegal at a point in time when it had made financial sense. However since the amalgamations of both Councils and due to the convergence of financial and other implications, it no longer made financial sense, therefore fuel was purchased in the North.

Councillor McLaughlin stated that although it was extremely difficult to plan for day one readiness, the SDLP endorsed the work undertaken by Council. She expressed concern that with 52 days until the implementation of Brexit, the civil service were only at the early stages of preparation. She stated that the government departments within Stormont had been reticent in making preparations as a result of the political difficulties over the past two and a half years, which had left the people with no voice. She commended Council's attempts from

the outset to introduce preparation at the early stages, however acknowledged that it was difficult to prepare for the unknown.

Councillor Cooper referred to the comments made by the previous speaker and stated that Martina Anderson MEP had worked towards securing the Special Status which had led to the inclusion of the backstop. He endorsed the recommendations within the report and highlighted Council's cross-border relationship and Donegal County Council as a key factor in terms of working on anticipated problems in the event of a no-deal Brexit. He further stated that he sought reassurance that sharing of information was taking place between Derry City and Strabane District Council with Donegal County Council and would continue to do so. He added that a tremendous amount of work had been undertaken regarding the cross-border and North West approach regarding Brexit.

In response, the Chief Executive advised that from the outset Derry City and Strabane District Council had taken the lead in working with the business community and the voluntary to consider the wider challenges of the impending Brexit and the impact on the wider North West cross-border Council area. He stated that the report specifically related to Council services for Derry City and Strabane District Council and the eleven Councils throughout Northern Ireland. He stated that it was his understanding that Donegal County Council were also considering the impact of Brexit, specifically on their services and that this Council was sharing information with them in relation to the risk matrix currently being developed. He outlined that there were a number of tiers of work taking place within the matrix which involved working at the wider Council and North West level.

Councillor Gallagher suggested that the eleven Councils plan for a 32 county socialist republic.

The Committee

Recommended **that Council note and endorse the work that is ongoing in relation to preparing the Council for Day One Readiness in the event of a No Deal Brexit specifically in relation to the delivery of Council services and functions.**

GSP17/19 Governance Arrangements

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She stated that the purpose of the report was to advise Members on a range of governance matters to be considered in preparation for the first Annual Meeting of the new Council to be held on 20 May.

Councillor McKeever thanked the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer for the report and welcomed the arrangements regarding rural needs.

Alderman Hussey stated that it was his understanding that the allowance for Vice-Chair was coupled with the Chair of a Committee and sought clarification on the matter. He stated that there was a need for rural needs to be included as a standing committee. He suggested that if Members recommended that the Assurance, Audit and Risk Committee meetings be held bimonthly, an opportunity existed for a standing body within Council on a bimonthly basis to fill that gap and to look specifically at rural needs. He then referred to the recommendation that decision making be delegated to the Chief Executive during the March/May recess. He stated that this was normal procedure, however constitutionally the Mayor was still in situ until the Annual General Meeting on 20 May 2019. He suggested that it would be prudent if the Chief Executive was in consultation with the Mayor during this period.

Councillor Cooper stated that Sinn Féin endorsed the recommendations within the report. He concurred with the recommendation for the Assurance, Audit and Risk (AAR) Committee meetings being held on a bimonthly basis, given the fact that those meetings had been quite short in the recent past. He suggested that a Special AAR meeting be held in the subsequent month if required should particular issues arise. He stated that in terms of the allowance issues, it was the view of Sinn Féin that the chairs and vice chairs of all other committees which fall monthly, that their allowance remain the same due to the similar workload. He supported that the recommendation that the 50% reduction in the allowance of Chair and Vice Chair of the AAR Committee be reallocated to all Members of the Planning Committee given the fact that it has been evidenced from last year, that all Members on that particular committee have had an increased workload due to the amount of planning applications received. He further stated that he welcomed the recommendation

regarding the provision for rural needs and sought clarity on arrangements of any additional proposals or suggestions.

In response, the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer stated that she noted the comments from Councillor McKeever regarding rural issues. In response to Alderman Hussey regarding the allowance for chairs and the Deputy-Mayor, she clarified that there was no linking of allowances therefore no decoupling process was suggested.

With reference to the Mayor and Deputy Mayoral allowance, she outlined that the primary purpose was to allow an inflationary increase to allowances which had remained fixed since 2015. She stated that in relation to the recess period, it would be normal practice for the Chief Executive to have delegated powers in terms of decision making. However, in the event of any issues arising which required consultation with Members, the Chief Executive would seek Members views during that recess period. She then referred to the suggestion regarding the formation of a rural committee and advised that this would have an impact on the number of committees and the resulting allocation of Special Responsibilities Allowance.

In addition, the Chief Executive stated that if any significant or controversial issues arose during the recess period, Members would be consulted. He advised that Council could now move forward in terms of setting timeframes and committee schedules and allocating the reduced allowance from AAR to Members of the Planning Committee if Members were in agreement. He further stated that in respect of the suggestions regarding the rural issues, discussions would continue on the matter and a further report would be brought forward as soon as possible.

The Committee

Recommended **that Council endorse the existing governance arrangements with exception to the following; (i) the frequency of the Assurance, Audit and Risk Committee is reduced from monthly to bi-monthly to reflect the volume of business and NIAO guidance, (ii) Allowances continue to be allocated on the**

same basis with the exception to the following; a 50% reduction in the allowances paid to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Assurance, Audit and Risk Committee, and the re-allocation of the resultant available allowances is made to the Members of the Planning Committee and; (iii) The Mayor and Deputy Mayor's allowances are uplifted in line with the inflationary increase to the basic allowance for the 2015-19 period and are fixed for the next four years; (iv) a further report detailing the allocated allowances to be presented at the March Committee meeting; (v) decision making is delegated to the Chief Executive during the March/May recess period; (vi) the Annual General Meeting of Council (AGM) and all Open Special Council meetings from the AGM to be webcast and (vii) further consideration be given regarding rural issues with a subsequent report to be brought forward.

GSP18/19 Absence Management Update

The Lead Human Resources 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 an update on progress in relation to Absence Management for the 6 month period April 2018 to September 2018.

Councillor McKnight endorsed the recommendation contained in the report and commended Council on the work undertaken regarding absence management which had resulted in a huge reduction in the number of absences. She stated that the introduction of various health and wellbeing programmes for employees had helped towards this

reduction and that as a Member of the appeals panel, staff were encouraged to avail of the support on offer.

Alderman Thompson welcomed the report and congratulated officers on their work on absence management and hoped that work would continue to have the absence rate further reduced.

Councillor Tierney welcomed the report and the reduction in absence figures. He concurred with Councillor McKnight's comments regarding the appeals panel and commended officers on the work undertaken to support staff to ensure that every possible arrangement was available to assist them to return to work and support them during that period. He stated that the SDLP would continue to give officers the needed support and congratulated them on the work thus far towards the reduction but would also like to see it reduced further.

In response to a query from Councillor McLaughlin regarding the new absence policy, the Lead Human Resources Officer stated that the new absence management policy outlined the various stages that an employee with attendance issues goes through. She outlined that the policy allowed staff to be supported throughout the process with various meetings until a final review would occur and at this stage an employee may be terminated. She stated that full support was available throughout the process and that very few employees had reached that final stage. She stated that the policy also outlined the various support mechanisms available such as the Be Well Programme, counselling services and Westfield Health and also the role of managers and how they could support employees.

Councillor Gallagher concurred with the remarks from the previous speakers and congratulated officers on the £300,000 potential savings by Council due to absence management.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members note the information presented and endorse the approach outlined to continue to manage absence.

GSP19/19 Guidance on 'Purdah'

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She

stated that the purpose of the report was to advise Members of guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association in respect of 'Purdah'; and to seek a change in the March Council meeting date so as to comply with the above guidance.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members approve the March Council meeting date be rescheduled to take place at 4pm on Tuesday 26 March 2019.

GSP20/19 NILGA Use of Data and Evidence in Community Planning

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 Committee approval for Members to attend a free one-day workshop on the Use of Data and Evidence in Community Planning on Friday 15 February 2019 in the Antrim Civic Centre.

Councillor McGuire was nominated by Councillor Cooper.

Councillor Tierney stated that the SDLP would nominate at full Council.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that the Committee approve attendance by any interested Member in this event and that such Members contact the Members Services Officer so the necessary arrangements can be put in place.

Open for Information

GSP21/19 Members' Declaration of Interests

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated for information purposes. She stated that the purpose of the report was to advise Members of enhance procedures associated with Member declaration of interests.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members note the application of these new procedures.

GSP22/19 Proposed Timeframe and Process for Policy on Emblems in the Workplace

The Lead Human Resources Officer presented the above report, which had been previously circulated for information purposes. She advised that the purpose of the report was to update Members on the proposed timeframe and process for the Policy on Emblems in the Workplace.

The Committee

Recommended that Members note the proposed timeframe and process as described within the report.

GSP23/19 Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service Consultation

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, which had been previously circulated for information purposes. She stated that the purpose of the report was to advise Members on the public consultation by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service seeking views on proposals to improve cost recover in the Civil Courts.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

GSP24/19 Arrangements for Local Government Elections 2019

The Chief Executive referred to the above report, which had been previously circulated for information purposes. He stated that the purpose of the report was to advise Members of arrangements for the Derry City and Strabane District Council Local Government Elections scheduled for 2 May 2019.

The Chief Executive referred to 4.2 within the report and stated that the preliminary cost figures were currently under review. He stated that the Northern Ireland Office set the threshold for expenditure and Council was currently liaising with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland regarding election costs. He informed Members that an update would be provided once details had been confirmed.

Councillor P Kelly referred to Royal Mail postage costs within 4.2 of the report and queried the cost to the ratepayer for the distribution of election literature. He queried why candidates could not pay their own postage costs and that using social media would reduce the expense to ratepayers as the majority of leaflets usually ended up in the recycling bin which was an added cost. He asked for a report outlining the Royal Mail postage costs for candidate literature.

In response, the Chief Executive advised that Council were guided by the Electoral Office in terms of costs. He advised that a costs for postage of candidate literature was agreed by the Electoral Office and a report would be presented to Members in that respect.

The Chairperson stated that as a matter of democracy everyone had the opportunity to view everyone's information.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members note the arrangements for the Derry City and Strabane District Council Local Government Elections in May 2019.

GSP25/19 A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) Dual Carriageway: Scheme Update

The Chief Executive presented the above report, which had been previously circulated for information purposes. He stated that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) Dual Carriageway Scheme.

Subsequently the Committee

Recommended that Members note the content of the report and the update on the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) Dual

**Carriageway Scheme provided by the
Department of Infrastructure.**

The Meeting then went into Confidential Business.