

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Open Minutes of Business and Culture Committee Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday 8 September 2020 at 4.00pm.

Present: Councillor Farrell (Chairperson); Alderman Guy, Ramsey, Warke; Councillor's J Barr, R Barr, M Boyle, Cooper, Cusack, Durkan, Ferguson, Logue, McCloskey and Mellon

Non-Committee Member: Councillor McCann

In Attendance: Director of Business and Culture (Mr S Gillespie), Head of Business (Mr K O'Connor), Head of Culture (Ms A McCarter) PA to Director of Business & Culture (Ms J Galloway-Doherty) and Committee Services Assistant (Mrs J Short).

BC105/20 Notice and Summons of Meeting

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

BC106/20 Member Attendance and Apologies

The Director of Business and Culture took the roll call and no apologies were noted.

BC107/20 Broadcasting Statement

The Chair read the Broadcasting Statement.

BC108/20 Declarations of Members' Interests

Alderman Warke and Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in Agenda Item: New Rural Policy Framework.

Alderman Ramsey and Councillor Cusack joined the meeting.

Open for Decision**BC109/20 Deputation: Strabane History Society Proposal to transform Milltown House/Lodge and Site into a Heritage/Visitors Centre**

The Chair invited Mr Pat McGuigan and Mr Roger Smyth, representatives of Strabane History Society to address the Committee.

Mr McGuigan thanked the Members for accepting their request to present today. He paid specific appreciation to the elected Members who represented the Sperrin Ward for their assistance so far. He also took the opportunity to thank the other representatives of Strabane History Society and interested parties responsible for the publication of the proposal to transform Milltown House and Lodge and part of the site into a Heritage or Visitors Centre so to promote the history of the Strabane area.

Mr McGuigan referred to the proposal document circulated to Members at the meeting. He explained that the main reason for their attendance was to request guidance from Council on how to achieve the proposal in a viable and successful way and to request assistance in the project.

Mr McGuigan referred to the history of Strabane area and said that Strabane was a very old town and had a lot of history to be proud of and the proposal would provide an opportunity to inform the younger generation of the history within Strabane for them to be proud of.

Mr Smyth reflected on the various literary giants from Strabane and included the famous hymn writer Ms Cecil Frances Alexander and other famous sons and daughters of Strabane; Brian O’Nolan, George Sigerson, John Dunlap, Herdman Family, Annie Dill Maunder, President Woodrow Wilson, Guy Carlton, Ezekiel J Donnell, Oliver Pollock, Joe Sheridan. He said that audio visuals would be used to show graphics and examples of the people’s lives and achievements at the proposed Milltown facility.

The Chair thanked the presenters for an interesting presentation. He invited Members to comment or seek points of clarification if they so wished.

Councillor Boyle thanked the representatives for the presentation. She said that it was an ambitious proposal and one that she would certainly be supportive of. She declared an interest as a direct descendent of Dr Sigerson. She referred to the proposal document and commented that it was impressive. She referred to the Minister of Education who had stated that the Milltown site be retained for educational purpose, so the proposal was timely in that regard. She added however, that it was an extensive site and queried if alternative potential funders had been approached by the Strabane History Society.

Mr McGuigan clarified for Councillor M Boyle that the Strabane History Society felt that it was important to seek Council support first before they would embark on seeking alternative funding. He emphasised that the priority was to save Milltown House first and then proceed with the development of the site.

Councillor M Boyle stated that she was aware of cross-community support within Strabane to preserve the iconic building. She assured the representatives that she would work collectively with other party colleagues in order to achieve this. She added that as alluded to earlier she was aware of other bodies/agencies viewing the site and it was therefore important that Council offered whatever support possible to the Strabane History Society to progress their endeavours.

Councillor R Barr welcomed the presentation. He referred to a previous meeting of Council (30 January 2020) when he had submitted a motion for Council to contact the Education Authority (NI) to investigate the possibility of acquiring the vacant site with a view to developing the site to provide a Visitor's Centre, park and nature trail. He advised that following discussion an amendment to the motion was agreed with a view to develop the site to address local social need priorities including sport, play and recreational facilities and potential social housing and he had agreed to support the amendment.

He stated that the Education Authority formally responded and stated that they would consider the future of the site once it was formally vacated by Strabane Grammar School. He agreed that Strabane had a colourful history and there were other legendary characters not mentioned by the Strabane History Society representatives that should

be included in the proposal. He added that the proposal offered a golden opportunity for cross-border projects and attract visitors to the town and wider District Council area. He referred to the town having suffered due to political indifferences and this provided an opportunity to promote the town's cultured past.

Councillor J Barr thanked the presenters for playing their part in keeping the history of Strabane alive for many years. He said that he was saddened to learn that the school had been vandalised during the first week of closure and it was therefore essential that a future use be identified. He welcomed the motion as referred to by Councillor R Barr which had been agreed by Council previously and also the proposal presented today for a Heritage Centre.

Councillor R Barr proposed, seconded by Councillor J Barr that Council Officials engage on behalf of the Strabane History Society with Tourism (NI) and the Education Authority to seek funding towards the project.

Councillor Cooper welcomed the presenters to the meeting and thanked them for their presentation. He agreed with previous speakers that the proposal was exciting and provided an opportunity for a wider tourism association with the City and the Sperrins. He referred to Councillor R Barr's proposal and advised that in terms of Tourism NI there was not a massive pot of funding available. He advised that whilst he agreed with the initial action to approach Council, it was necessary to widen the funding options and to engage with other funding providers in going forward.

Councillor Cusack concurred with the previous speaker's comments. She urged caution for the Strabane History Society not to restrict their funding options to Tourism NI and the Education Authority and to pursue other potential funding bodies.

Councillor R Barr expressed his contentment to amend his previous proposal and for Officials to engage with other relevant funding bodies.

Alderman Warke on behalf of his party expressed the view that they were content to support the proposal.

The Chair advised that he preferred for Council Officials to firstly engage with the Strabane History Society in order to outline potential next steps in the funding process and to draw up a business case prior to investigating alternative funding opportunities. He sought the views of Members on the way forward.

Discussion ensued after which it was agreed for Council officials to engage with the Strabane History Society and for an update report to be presented to Committee at a future meeting.

The Committee

Recommended that i) Council Officials engage with the Strabane History Society in order to consider the proposal regarding the transformation of Milltown House and Lodge into a Heritage or Visitors Centre; ii) and for an update on progress be provided at a future Business and Culture Committee Meeting.

The presenters left the meeting at this stage.

Chairperson's Business

BC110/20 Expression of condolence to the family of Sir Ken Robinson

The Chair referred to the passing of Sir Ken Robinson on 21 August 2020. He said that he was a great friend of the City and took a keen interest in the City of Culture Bid in 2013. He expressed his condolences to the family and friends of Sir Ken Robinson.

BC111/20 Invest NI and the Department of the Economy

The Chair referred to an invitation to the Economy Minister, Diane Dodds to meet with Committee to discuss the Department adopting a regional approach in terms of funding allocations because DCSDC had the highest economic inactivity. He expressed concern that the Minister had not accepted the request to attend however she had indicated that her Officials would be in attendance. He confirmed that no Officials were in attendance and expressed his disappointment.

The Director of Business and Culture advised that officials from Invest NI were available to present today, however due to the unavailability of Senior Officials from the Department of the Economy it was decided to wait until next month for representation. He further advised that Invest NI had proposed to present with the University of Ulster and the North West Regional College jointly. However, it was his understanding that this was not what Members had expected, as they were fully aware of the joint initiatives and the purpose was more about what was being achieved in order to address the regional balance rather than a repeat of what was presented previously.

He acknowledged that there had been job announces and successes by Invest NI, however it was imperative that Officials attended to report on progress from a regional perspective.

The Chair requested Members to decide whether they would prefer that Invest NI Officials attended the next Committee Meeting alone or together with Officials from the Department of Economy and the University.

Councillor Cooper expressed the party view that it would be preferable that Invest NI Officials attended separately in order to present concrete proposals in line with a regional perspective. He added that the skills agenda in collaboration with the Universities was a totally separate issue. He further added that it was essential for Committee to meet with the Economy Minister in order to address the wider economic issue of policy change at a sub-regional level.

Councillor Ferguson agreed with the previous speaker's comments. She stated that it was not necessary to hear a repeat of skills development by the Universities. Members were entitled to know what had been progressed by Invest NI since the previous meeting.

Councillor Cusack concurred with previous speakers and added that whilst education and skills development were massive issues, Invest NI were a separate institution and needed to be scrutinised on that basis.

Councillor McCloskey agreed that Invest NI and the University had separate remits and it was therefore essential that 2 separate discussions be co-ordinated.

Alderman Ramsey agreed with the previous speaker's views in terms of separate agendas. He said that the economic impact of Covid-19

exacerbated the issues that already existed, and it was therefore essential that discussions take place with Invest NI and the Department for Economy as soon as possible.

Discussion ensued, after which the consensus was for Officials from Invest NI and the Department for Economy to be invited to present to Committee meeting in November to discuss progress at a sub-regional level. It was also agreed for Officials from Invest NI, North West Regional College and the University of Ulster to be invited to the Committee Meeting next month to give an update on skills development.

BC112/20 Harbour Square Re-development – Factory Girls Sculpture

The Chair referred to the redevelopment of Harbour Square project and in particular the submission to DSD for proposed artwork to commemorate the Factory Girls. He asked for an update on the current status of funding request to DSD, taking into consideration a delay due to the current pandemic.

The Director of Business and Culture clarified for Members that the initial proposal reflected a complex procurement strategy and the Economic Appraisal was submitted to DFC and awaited approval. He reported that the initial cost for the first phase of the project was £100k and Council's contribution was 10% or £10k. However, the estimated amount for phase 1 of the design had increased to £170k, therefore DFC requested that Council increase their contribution for Phase 1 by £7k. He assured Members that progress had been achieved despite the complexity of the procurement process. It was agreed for an update report to be presented at the next meeting.

Councillor Logue welcomed the progress made to date with the Factory Girls project. She suggested that a meeting be held with the representatives of the Factory Girls who had met previously so that they are kept informed of the progress. This was supported by Councillor Cusack.

The Director of Business and Culture agreed to engage with the Factory Girls representatives prior to an update report being presented to Committee next month.

BC113/20 Letter of Condolence to the family of the late Rev. Canon Albert Thomas (Kerry) Waterstone.

Alderman Guy requested a letter of condolence be sent to the family of the late Rev. Canon Albert Waterstone, who was the founder of the 'Ulster Project' in 1975.

Alderman Guy explained that the project was a peace-making organisation that worked with teenagers from Northern Ireland and was dedicated to the promotion of a peaceful co-existence between Catholic and Protestant teenagers by building tolerance, trust and ongoing positive relationships amongst potential leaders from both traditions.

He added that over 3000 teenagers from the City, Castlederg, Sion Mills, Portadown, Fermanagh, Coleraine and Belfast had benefitted from lasting friendships made when they had participated in the Ulster Project in various parts of America.

BC114/20 Brexit Development

Councillor Durkan referred to the recent developments in the Brexit negotiations and the potential disregard and contempt by the British Government. She said that it had been well documented about the concerns and impact on businesses and families and it was imperative that Council continued to ensure that representations were made on their behalf to the British Government.

BC115/20 Decade of Centenaries Celebrations 2021

Alderman Warke proposed, seconded by Alderman Ramsey that an update on the plans for the Decade of Centenaries celebrations in 2021 be provided at the next Committee meeting.

The Committee

Recommended that an update report on the Councils plans for the centenary celebrations in 2021, be provided at the next Committee meeting.

BC116/20 Social Media Platforms

Alderman Warke requested that parents of young children are advised through the Council's media to monitor social media platforms because there was a distressing video released and could be accessed via Tiktok, Facebook and Whatsapp.

BC117/20 Matters Arising from the Open Minutes of the Business and Culture Committee meeting held on Tuesday 7 July 2020.

Councillor McCann referred to minute reference BC89/20: Economic Recovery. He emphasised the need to ensure that the £33m support package was allocated to cultural/arts organisations and not specifically to large venues.

The Chair advised that a positive response had been received from the Minister of Culture who stated that he was waiting on a response from the Finance Minister regarding the specific funding allocation.

Councillor Cooper indicated that the Minister of Culture was well informed of the organisations that required funding provision and therefore he would have no hesitation that the money would be allocated fairly amongst cultural/arts organisations throughout the City and District.

BC118/20 Cultural Grant Aid Programme Update

The Head of Culture presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to secure Member approval for adjustments to the allocation of Culture Grant Aid programmes from underspend in Headline Events Fund 2020/21 to be reallocated to an overspend in Community Festival Funding 2020/2021 in light of the current coronavirus crisis.

The Committee

Recommended **that Council approves the proposed award allocation outlined in the report from Headline Events 2020/21 to Community Festival Funding 2020/21**

BC119/20 Christmas 2020 – Programming and Marketing Development

The Head of Culture presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on programming development and marketing for Christmas 2020 and to seek approval for the overall budget spend on this programme.

Councillor Cusack welcomed the report and expressed appreciation for the vast amount of work carried out by the Council Officials. She sought clarity as to how the virtual light switch-on would be managed and other events to ensure adherence to social-distancing guidelines.

The Head of Culture assured Members that as outlined within the report the Christmas light switch-on event would be delivered virtually in order to discourage physical attendance by the public. She said that the main objective was to deliver some level of animation throughout the City centre so to encourage safe numbers to shop and go to the restaurants. She said that it was important to maintain a balance to encourage some physical presence whilst adhering to social-distancing rules. She assured Members that a Health and Safety team would be on the ground for any animation activities and if there was an influx of people the activity would not proceed. She added that it was a challenging time in order to ensure that everyone had a good experience during the Christmas programme of events, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic crisis.

Councillor M Boyle welcomed the report and commented that it certainly would be a Christmas programme with a difference this year. She paid tribute to the Head of Culture and her team for their innovative approach in the delivery of a programme of events. She referred to the virtual Christmas Light switch-on events to be held in the City and Strabane Town and queried how the smaller towns and villages throughout the District intended to manage their events to meet the expectation of the Community whilst adherence to social-distancing.

The Head of Culture advised that Council was not responsible for the delivery of the switch-on events outside of the City and Strabane Town. However, the Events team would be happy to give advice to any group who wanted it and the Safety Advisory Group facilitated by Council would operate as usual regarding public safety guidance.

Councillor M Boyle further referred to the success of the Christmas Craft Fair held the previous year. She queried if any consideration was given in terms of the Craft providers using empty premises available in the City and Strabane Town in the run-up to Christmas. She asked that this be explored in going forward.

She also referred to the marketing campaign and asked that Strabane Town be included particularly in the televised marketing as some people had expressed concern that the focus was more on what the City offered.

The Head of Culture in response to Members explained that the Mayor's Christmas Programme would be delivered across the City and District and Communities would work with the Mayor to allow him to have as much participation as possible. She added that traditionally the Mayor would have delivered various Christmas activities in the Guildhall and Alley Theatre, however due to the current pandemic this was not possible and hence the development of the Mayor's Christmas Community Programme.

She also clarified that the budget allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal Areas was separate and this activity would be bolted onto other programme activities throughout the City and District. She assured Members that there would be a cohesive programme and because this was the first year of the Mayor leading activity directly in communities it was very much co-ordinated by Council and would be joined up.

She assured Members that if restrictions were lifted the programmes would be adjusted accordingly. However, it was about striking a balance and to encourage smaller community events in order to ensure smaller group attendance.

Councillor Mellon said that it was important to ensure that there was no duplication of activities amongst the communities and that funding allocation was resourced fairly.

Councillor Cooper commented that in terms of duplication and maximisation of events it was important to ensure that if there were areas that offered no events it was essential that the Mayor visited those areas in order to ensure that all Communities benefited from the Christmas programme of events.

Discussion ensued regarding the budget allocation towards Neighbourhood Renewal Christmas Programme activities and a request that it be increased despite a reduction in the overall budget. Members suggested that the budget allocated by the Mayor to his activities could be re-allocated to the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

The Head of Culture advised that this was a matter for the Mayor and if Members wished to increase the budget to the Community Christmas Programme she was content to ask the Mayor or alternatively reduce the budget allocated to the wider activity or discuss with the Lead Finance Officer to see if the overall budget can be increased. She agreed for an update report to be brought back to a future Committee Meeting.

The Committee

Recommended that Council i) approve programming and financial arrangements as outlined within the report; ii) agree for Council Officials to seek additional funding particularly towards Christmas Community Events.

BC120/20 Post Covid-19 Recovery – Labour Market Interventions Update

The Head of Business presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on the labour market interventions progressed with stakeholders to help mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market.

Councillor Durkan welcomed the report. She referred to the stark unemployment crisis and the threat of people finding themselves unemployed for the first time in their working lives. She added that pre-Covid-19 businesses were struggling and having to deal with the uncertainty that surrounded Brexit and it was an increasingly anxious time for businesses. She referred to the furlough scheme which was due to end next month and was encouraged to note that some MLA's had put forward a motion to extend the furlough scheme in Northern Ireland, similar to other countries that agreed for the scheme to be extended to 2021 and even 2022.

Councillor Dukan proposed, seconded by Councillor Cooper that this Council made representation to the British Government to call for an extension of the furlough scheme and to be replaced with the self-employment income support scheme and job retention scheme, particularly for sectors such as hospitality, non-food retail and arts/culture throughout the region.

Alderman Ramsey proposed an amendment to the previous proposal, and for Council to write to the MP's representing the City and District Council area. Councillor Cooper seconded the amended proposal.

Councillor Cooper welcomed the report. He stated that it was essential for the reskilling of people from other sectors to be pursued and extra resources was required in order to return to the labour skills market. He further stated that duplication of training programmes had to be prevented and there had to be clear targets set and for discussion to take place across the board. He added that it was encouraging to note increased collaboration amongst Council Officials and the Universities/Colleges, however it was essential to create a Job Creation and Skills Unit within Council. He proposed that a report be brought back to Committee in that regard. Councillor Mellon seconded the proposal.

Councillor R Barr left the meeting.

Alderman Guy commented that it was heartening to note the forging of close linkages between the Business Directorate and the Mayor of the City of London.

Councillor M Boyle referred to the most vulnerable highly skilled workforce within the construction industry and in particular those workers who were aged 50+ who were currently furloughed and faced the risk of losing their jobs due to the current pandemic crisis. She asked if there was any scope within the Employment Academy to engage with this sector in going forward.

The Head of Business advised Members that the former Derry City Council had achieved a good track record in terms of working on a number of projects with people to identify where the skills gap existed. The Construction Employment Academy provided a re-engagement of local trade providers and to build confidence to explore an alternative

career/job pathway. He added that the process would begin with having a conversation and hopefully would result in a clearly defined pathway for people to be encouraged and to explore, it was about adopting a more holistic approach to numerous initiatives established over previous years.

The Head of Business in response to the Chair, clarified that in terms of leverage of funding, the majority of initiatives would be delivered in collaboration and when the Skills Academy would be relaunched the Colleges would have an input in the augmentation process.

The Committee

Recommended

- i) that Council approve the interventions and associated allocation of budgets;**
- ii) that Council notes that regular reports will be presented to Members to provide an update on the progression of each initiative;**
- iii) that Council writes to the UK Government and local MP's to call for an extension to the furlough scheme and to be replaced with the self-employment income support scheme and job retention scheme;**
- iv) for consideration to be given to the creation of a Job Creation and Skills Unit within Council and for a report to be brought back to Committee in due course.**

Open for Information

BC121/20 Procurement on Marketing Update

The Head of Culture presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the outcome of tender exercises undertaken by the marketing team.

Members noted for information the above report.

BC122/20 Halloween 2020 Update

The Head of Culture provided the above report to Members in order to update on planning, programme development and Health and Safety position of the Halloween Festival 2020.

The Head of Culture in response to Members clarified that the marketing campaign for the fireworks displays in both the City and Strabane Town would clearly inform the public that they would be able to and should view the displays from their own homes. She also agreed to include animal safety/awareness information in the marketing material and communication for the fireworks displays.

Members noted for information the above report.

BC123/20 ESF Year 3 Quarter 1 Update

The Head of Business provided an update on the year 3 quarter 1 (April 2020-June 2020) on 5 ESF projects, match funded by Council to deliver services to those who are unemployed/economically inactive.

Members noted the above report for information.

BC124/20 New Rural Policy Framework

The Head of Business provided an update to Members on the timescale and process for the new Rural Policy Framework which will replace the current Rural Development Programme.

Members noted the above report for information.

BC125/20 PEACE IV Update

The Head of Business provided an update to Members on the implementation of the DCSDC PEACE IV Programme.

Members noted the above report for information.

The Meeting went into Confidential Business.