

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

**Open Minutes of Business and Culture Committee Meeting held remotely on Tuesday 10 November 2020 at 4.00pm.**

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

**Non-Committee Members: Alderman Hussey; Councillor's Donnelly and 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).**

### **BC151/20 Notice and Summons of Meeting**

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

### **BC152/20 Member Attendance and Apologies**

The Director of Business and Culture took the roll call and full attendance was noted.

### **BC153/20 Statement for Remote Meetings**

The Chair read the Statement for Remote Meetings.

### **BC154/20 Declarations of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

## **Open for Decision**

### **Chairperson's Business**

#### **BC155/20 Proposed Meeting with Invest NI and the Department for the Economy**

The Chair referred to a previous Committee Meeting when it was agreed that Senior Officials from the Department of Economy together with Invest NI be invited to meet with Committee to address the wider economic issues at sub-regional level. He proposed that Officials be invited to present at the Committee Meeting scheduled to take place in January 2021. Councillor Cooper seconded the proposal.

Councillor Cooper referred to a recent discussion he and party colleagues had with Officials from Invest NI in respect to the lack of progress from a sub-regional perspective. He said that he was disappointed with the outcome of the discussion and that further discussions would be pursued. He encouraged all parties to maintain pressure on Government Departments to address the reason of major gaps that resulted in the lack of inward investment opportunities for the region which was fundamental in the creation of employment for the DCSDC area.

The consensus from Members was in support of the proposal and the Committee;

**Recommended that Senior Officials from Department for the Economy and Invest NI be invited to present to Committee at meeting in January 2021.**

#### **BC156/20 Localised Restrictions Support Scheme due to Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Chair referred to the introduction of the Localised Restrictions Business Support Scheme for the hospitality sector that was forced to close from 5 October 2020 and for close contact services from 16 October 2020. He expressed concern that some businesses had not yet received the payment. He said that Government had to ensure that

effective systems were in place in order to ensure that payments were released to businesses within the expected timeframe. He asked for the Head of Business to provide an update on the current situation.

The Head of Business advised that currently the Business Team acted as a broker between businesses and the Department of Finance in terms of seeking information and providing advice and support. He said that following the launch of the scheme on 26 October 2020 the Department of Finance advised businesses of a 3-week waiting time before any money would be released, due to the sheer volume of applications to be processed. He said that the Department was working hard to process the applications as quickly as possible whilst trying to ensure no fraudulent activity. He assured Members that the Business Team would continue to communicate with the Department of Finance and update businesses accordingly.

The Chair proposed that Council writes to the Department of Finance to request that additional resources be made available in order to expediate the process so that businesses received payments on a timely manner. Councillor Durkan seconded the proposal.

The Committee

**Recommended that Council writes to the Department of Finance to request additional resources be made available in order to process the applications for the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme more expediently, so that eligible businesses received the payment on a timely manner.**

Councillor Durkan thanked the Head of Business and the Business Support Team for the work achieved to date. She referred to non-food independent retailers that were falling through the cracks in terms of receiving financial support due to the localised restrictions. She proposed that representation be made to the Department for Economy in that regard. Councillor Ferguson seconded the proposal.

The Committee

**Recommended that Council makes representation to the Department for Economy to address the need for a funding package to be made available for non-food independent retailers due to localised restrictions as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.**

Councillor M Boyle paid tribute to the Head of Business and the Business Support Team for the work carried out in terms of assisting businesses during the current pandemic crisis. She said that the frustration expressed by businesses was primarily due to similar businesses in other Council areas having received payment from the support scheme, despite the fact that this Council area was forced into lockdown two weeks previous.

The Head of Business in response to Alderman Guy's query agreed to provide him with the information regarding the number of businesses that applied for the first round of funding support.

Alderman Ramsey thanked the Head of Business and the Team for the work carried out to date. He said that business proprietors were highly frustrated this week due to the uncertainty over the Governments deliberations to lift restrictions. He referred to when the Pandemic first started and frontline and retail workers continued to work despite the health risk. He said that people should be allowed to return to work especially when employers had spent a lot of money to ensure that the correct precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the virus were in place to safeguard employees and the public.

Alderman Ramsey proposed, seconded by Alderman Warke that Council writes to the Executive to express support of the reopening of the hospitality sector and other businesses so to avoid the risk of complete closure.

Councillor Gallagher also paid tribute to the Head of Business and the Business Support Team for the work carried out. He referred to Alderman Ramsey's previous comments and said that he would not support any proposal to urge Government to lift the restrictions without the scientific or medical evidence to substantiate such a decision.

Councillor Cooper referred to Alderman Ramsey's previous comments in terms of risk and expressed concern that to ignore the medical advice to extend localised restrictions was in his opinion a major risk to the public and it was inevitable that deaths would result. He stated that on behalf of his party they would not support the proposal because their primary concern was to support restrictions in order to reduce the spread of the virus and that Alderman Ramsey's proposal was somewhat counterintuitive in that regard.

Councillor Cusack on behalf of her party expressed the view that they would not support Alderman Ramsey's proposal and would support the medical advice to extend the lockdown for a further two-week period.

Alderman Guy expressed the opinion that he would not support Alderman Ramsey's proposal. He said that it was the responsibility of the Executive to decide on whether to lift restrictions based on medical advice.

Further discussion ensued after which the Chair stated that the general consensus from Members was not to support Alderman Ramsey's proposal.

Alderman Ramsey agreed to withdraw his proposal. He however reiterated that he intended to make no apology for his proposal to support the reopening of the hospitality sector. He stated that his argument was in total defence of the protection of local businesses and to minimise the risk of unemployment. He agreed that whilst there would be health risks associated with the reopening of businesses, there was a higher risk of mental health issues due to job losses.

**BC157/20 Funding support for Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector due to Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Chair referred to the recent announcement of Government support towards the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. He said that he hoped everything was being done by

Council to communicate to the groups the recent announcement of funding support from the Department for Communities. He asked the Head of Culture to brief Members on the recent funding packages as follows:

Department for Communities have outlined the following support funds via the following organisations.

- £2m for Community, Arts, Culture and Heritage Fund via Community Foundation NI – Culture, Language, Arts and Heritage Support Programme opened 2 November 2020 with grants between £2,000 to £20,000.
- £7.5m for Stability and Renewal Programme for Organisations via Arts Council NI, opened 28 October 2020 closing 12 Noon 27 November. Grants of up to £500,000 available to organisations working in the arts and cultural sector.
- £5.5m Heritage Recovery Fund NI via National Lottery Heritage Fund opened on 2 November, closing 12 noon on 27 November 2020. Grants of £3,000 to £250,000 for organisations across the heritage sector to ensure reopening by 31 March 2021.

The Head of Culture reported that in addition to these funds £2.5m will be shared among the Irish Language, Ulster Scots and Sign Language sectors and £3m for individual arts via ACNI.

The Head of Culture confirmed that the Arts and Cultural groups listed on the Council's extensive database had already been contacted directly. She also advised that social media was another mechanism used to promote the funding schemes and hoped that as a result of the extensive communication there would be a positive uptake from the relevant groups.

### **BC158/20 Newly Elected President of America**

The Chair referred to the recent election of US President Elect Joe Biden and Vice President Elect Kamala Harris and proposed that Council write to congratulate them on their election to the White House and to invite them to this Council area if they visit the island of Ireland. Councillor Cusack seconded the proposal.

Councillor McCann (non-committee Member) expressed the opinion that he would not be supportive of the proposal.

The outcome of the vote; For 11, Against 0, Abstention 2. The proposal was carried.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **that Council writes to congratulate the US President Elect Joe Biden and Vice President Elect Kamala Harris on their recent election to the White House and to invite them to this Council area if they visit the island of Ireland.**

**BC159/20      Matters Arising from the Open Minutes of the Business and Culture Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 13 October 2020**

There were no matters arising from the above minutes.

**BC160/20      Annual Service Plan 2020/21 – Business and Culture Directorate**

The Director of Business and Culture presented the above report, a copy of which was previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval to adopt the Service Plan for 2020/21 for the Business and Culture Directorate.

Councillor Cooper welcomed the report. He expressed appreciation to the Business and Culture Directorate for the work carried out during the current Pandemic crisis. He referred to the recent meeting with relevant Government Departments and Universities and said that it was important that progress be achieved in moving forward with skills development opportunities. He welcomed the Ebrington proposals and stated that they were a key asset for the tourism sector. He referred to his previous comments regarding the lack of progress from Invest NI and urged all parties to retain a united voice in order to ensure delivery of projects from a sub-regional level throughout the City and District Council area.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to the Director of Business and Culture and his Officer team on the work achieved to date despite the challenging environment due to the current Coronavirus Pandemic. He

added that he looked forward in anticipation to the return of a vibrant City and District in the future.

**BC161/20 Covid Recovery & Revitalisation Plan: Business Start Up Grants**

The Head of Business presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval to develop/deliver a Covid Recovery Start Up Grant Programme to support new business starts in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

The Committee

**Recommended that Council approve the proposal to develop/deliver a Covid Recovery Start Up Grant Programme to support new business starts.**

**BC162/20 PEACE IV Statistical Support Services**

The Head of Business presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the essential statistical support services required for the successful delivery of the PEACE IV Programme and to seek approval for provision of that service via NISRA (NI Statistical Research Agency).

The Committee

**Recommended that Council approve the appointment of NISRA (via 'The Hub') to provide the statistical support services required by the PEACE IV Programme.**

**BC163/20 Cultural Grant Aid Programme 2021/22**

The Head of Culture presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to secure Member approval for the full retention of the budgets allocated to the Cultural Organisation Funding Programme, Access Improvement Programme, Heritage Animation Programme, Headline Event Funding

Programme, Community Festival Funding Programme and Artist Award Programme for 2021/22.

Councillor Mellon welcomed the report and recommendations as outlined.

Alderman Hussey (non-committee Member) referred to the availability of grant aid assistance towards heritage organisations that may wish to commemorate the Centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021.

The Chair in response to Alderman Hussey clarified that the issue was discussed at length by Members at the previous Council meeting and the proposal agreed was for Council not to participate in any events that commemorated or celebrated this injustice.

Councillor Cusack welcomed the report. She expressed disappointment that the Department for Communities made no contribution towards the Community Festivals programme 2020/21 and there was also no guarantee of a contribution for 2021/22.

The Head of Culture in response to Councillor Cusack confirmed that Council would continue to pursue the Department for Communities in terms of funding allocation for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The Committee

**Recommended** that Council i) approve the retention, in full, of the cultural grant aid budgets as detailed within the report, subject to the confirmation of budgets for next year's rates process; ii) approve the permanent adjustment to the financial verification process and the adoption of a 3-year award cycle for Cultural Organisations; iii) approve the adjustment and relaunch of the Access Programme enabling all cultural organisations in DCSDC to apply for support up to a maximum of £30,000; iv) approve the permanent increase in the proposed award allocation of

**£16,000 outlined in the report for the Artist and Practitioner Fund; v) approve the continuation of Covid adjustments to the Community Festival and Headline Events; vi) approve the adjustment to the Headline Events fund for one year to reduce the economic weighting to 25% and minimum spend to £30,000.**

**BC164/20 Access Programme for Cultural Venues 20/21 In Year Call Results**

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 the allocation of funding for the in-year Access Programme for Cultural Organisations 2020/21.

The Committee

**Recommended that Council approve the awards to Venue A of £19,631 and Venue B of £20,000 as outlined within the report.**

**Open for Information**

**BC165/20 Post Covid-19 Recovery – Update on Labour Market Interventions**

The Head of Business presented the above report, details of which were 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.

Members noted the contents of the above report.

**BC166/20 Business Innovation and Growth Programme**

The Head of Business presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with a progress update on the Business Innovation and Growth Programme (BIG).

Members noted the contents of the above report.

**The meeting went into confidential business.**