

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of the Corporate Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, Island Civic Centre, The Island, Lisburn on Wednesday 13th March 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

Alderman O Gawith (Chair)
Councillor A Ewing (Vice-Chair)
Deputy Mayor
Councillor G McCleave
Aldermen A Ewart MBE, M Guy and H Legge
Councillors P Burke, R Carlin, K Dickson, N Eaton, A Givan,
C Kemp, U Mackin and The Hon N Trimble

OTHER MEMBERS:

Councillors G Hynds and C McCready

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive
Director of Finance & Corporate Services
Director of Organisation Development & Innovation
Director of Regeneration & Growth
Acting Director of Environmental Services
Head of Corporate Communications & Administration
Head of Finance
Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development
Member Services Officers (RN & BS)

Commencement of Meeting

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and advised that it would be audio recorded unless the item on the agenda was to be considered under confidential business.

The names of those Elected Members in attendance at the meeting were read out by the Member Services Officer.

The Chair stated that unauthorised recording was not permitted, as per 8.5 of the Council's Standing Orders. The Chair also reminded everyone to ensure that mobile phones were turned off or on silent mode for the duration of the meeting.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services proceeded to outline the evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency. Finally, the Chair asked that any Member entering or leaving the meeting alert the Member Services Officer accordingly so that this might be accurately reflected in the minutes.

1. Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance at the meeting were accepted and recorded on behalf of Councillors T Beckett and B Higginson; and the Head of Assets.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited Members to declare any interests they might have in relation to the business of the meeting and reminded them of the requirement that they complete Declaration of Interest forms in this regard which had been provided with the papers for the meeting and which were also available in the Chamber.

The following Declaration of Interest was made:-

- Alderman H Legge - Item 3.1 of Report of Director of Finance & Corporate Services – “NILGA response to Revenue Raising”. (An office-bearer in NILGA and as such was a signatory to both items of correspondence contained in the report.)

3. Report of Director of Finance & Corporate Services

3.1 Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
Response to Revenue Raising

Consultations from the Department of Finance on the subject of Revenue Raising had been reported to a previous meeting of the Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor K Dickson, seconded by Councillor A Givan and agreed to recommend that the content of the undernoted items of correspondence which NILGA had submitted by way of responses to the Revenue Raising consultations be noted:-

- letter dated the 17th January 2024 to the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Finance;
- letter dated the 29th January 2024 to the Chief Executive of Land & Property Services.

4. Report of Head of Corporate Communications & Administration

4.1 Council Remote/Hybrid Meetings

Presented by the Chief Executive.

4.1.1 Legislation and Consultative Exercise

The legislation which allowed for the holding of meetings on a remote basis had expired on the 6th March 2024, thereby reverting on the 7th March 2024 to the situation pre-coronavirus.

In addition to the narrative report which explained this matter further, Members noted the following:-

- letter dated the 1st March 2024 from the Director of Local Government & Housing Regulation at the Department for Communities;
- the Council's standing orders as at the 7th March 2024 highlighting the changes as occasioned by the termination of the remote meeting legislation.

A report to formally amend the Council's standing orders would be presented to the Council at its meeting to be held on the 26th March 2024.

The Chief Executive referred to the undernoted items of correspondence which had been received on the 12th March 2024 and which had been provided to Members in advance of the meeting by way of an updated meeting pack:-

- letter dated the 12th March 2024 from the Director of Local Government & Housing Regulation at the Department for Communities advising of the Minister's commitment to give councils the flexibility to hold meetings by remote/hybrid means, and the consultative steps being put in place so as to achieve this;
- draft Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2024 on which comments are sought by the 26th March 2024.

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on this matter advising that:-

- there was no timescale for the new regulations being put in place so as to allow for remote/hybrid attendance, therefore attendance at meetings would continue on a physical basis in the Council offices;
- the provision of reasonable adjustments within the Chamber for those Members with specific requirements was being explored. Such provisions would be notified to Members in due course. Members were asked to notify the Chief Executive of any other specific provisions they might wish to have considered.

A number of Members offered comment on the general ethos of remote/hybrid meetings.

4.1.1 Legislation and Consultative Exercise Cont'd

In regard to the consultation process which had a closing date of the 26th March 2024, the Chair was aware that a number of representations had been made to the Minister urging an early decision on the way forward regarding hybrid/remote meetings. The Chief Executive stated that the timescale for the closure of the consultation coupled with the seeking of legal advice would indicate that the Minister was giving this matter urgent attention. A letter to the Minister on the Council's behalf asking that the matter be expedited was not therefore considered necessary at this point in time. It was likely that political parties were making representations in this regard also.

4.1.2 Commencement time for Meetings

Given that the option to attend meetings on a remote basis did not exist at present, the Chief Executive suggested that Members might wish to have meetings commencing at a later time. To progress this matter, the Chairmen of the Committees could consult with their memberships and agree a revised commencement time if this was deemed necessary. Revised times would be on a Committee-specific basis, rather than the same time for all Committees.

In regard to the commencement time for meetings of the Corporate Services Committee, the Chair took an initial assessment of Members' preferences but advised that he would undertake further consultation and consideration in this regard.

4.1.3 Viewing meetings on a remote basis but without participation

The Chief Executive stated that – under the current governance – meetings are not available on a remote basis. What is less clear is the availability to listen and view a meeting but with absolutely no participation. The Chief Executive would explore this matter further.

4.1.4 Report to Council on 26th March 2024

A report on the subject of hybrid/remote meetings would be presented to the Council on the 26th March 2024.

4.2 Review of Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council Events

In addition to the narrative report, the following items had been provided:-

- the Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council Events as of January 2020;
- the draft Terms of Reference for a Members' Focus Group to inform on the development of a new policy regarding the above matter and also on the standard programme of annual civic events.

4.2 Review of Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council Events Cont'd

The Head of Service reported that – as part of the review - equality screening of the proposed policy would be carried out. The 2020 policy had not originally been equality screened but screening had been carried out retrospectively and mitigations identified.

It was proposed by Alderman A Ewart and seconded by Councillor A Ewing that – subject to the replacement of the words “Her Majesty” by “His Majesty”, the 2020 Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council Events be accepted as the new policy going forward, the involvement of a Members Focus Group not being required.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services summarised views that the Officers could review the policy and carry out equality screening on it. The revised policy and attendant equality screening could then be presented to the Committee for final review and approval. In light of this, Alderman Ewart withdrew his Proposal and supported the Director’s summarised views. Alderman Ewart proposed, and Councillor Ewing seconded that:-

- the Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council events be reviewed and revised by Officers;
- the revised policy be equality screened;
- the revised policy together with its attendant equality screening, be presented to the Committee for final review and approval.

The proposal in the name of Alderman Ewart and seconded by Councillor Ewing was put to the meeting and – on a show of hands, the voting being five in favour and eight against – was declared “lost”.

The recommendations of the report were put to the meeting on a Proposal made by Alderman M Guy and seconded by Alderman H Legge. On a show of hands – the voting being 10 in favour and two against – the recommendations of the report were accepted, ie that:-

- the planned review of the Policy on Invitations to Civic Functions, Visits & Council Events be noted;
- an Elected Member Focus Group in line with draft Terms of Reference as provided in the report be agreed;
- Party nominations to the Elected Member Focus Group be provided to the Acting Member Services/PCSP Manager by the 27th March 2024, such membership being on the basis of one Member per party including Independent Members.

4.3 D-Day 80: 6 June 2024

In addition to the narrative report, copies of the undernoted items had been provided and were duly noted on a Proposal made by Alderman H Legge and seconded by Councillor A Givan:-

- minutes of meeting of the D-Day Working Group held on the 21st February 2024;
- the rolling D-Day Programme and required budgets (as provided on 6th March 2024).

Alderman H Legge, Chair of the D-Day Working Group, thanked the Officers for their work on this matter.

4.4 Review of Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors

In addition to the narrative report, Members had been provided with the Terms of Reference for the Review of the Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors as provided by the Department for Communities.

It was proposed by Councillor N Eaton, seconded by Councillor C Kemp and agreed to recommend that any Member who might wish to engage in the Department's review process, should pass their contact details to the Acting Member Services/PCSP Manager by the 20th March 2024 for onward transmission to the Review Panel. The Panel would then contact the Member direct.

5. Report of Head of Finance

5.1 Treasury Out-Turn for Quarter 3 of 2023/2024

In addition to the narrative report, Members had been provided with the following reports in regard to Quarter 3 of 2023/2024:-

- Treasury Out-Turn;
- Prudential Indicators.

It was proposed by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor G McCleave, seconded by Councillor K Dickson and agreed to recommend that the content of the above reports be noted.

6. Report of Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development

6.1 Workforce Reports

In addition to the narrative report, reports on the undernoted topics in relation to Council staff across all Departments had been provided and their contents duly noted on a Proposal made by Councillor A Givan and seconded by Alderman H Legge:-

- Attendance Management Report for period ended 31st December 2023;
- Recruitment reports – (i) Advert & Selection; and (ii) Appointments;
- Workforce Profile.

A lengthy discussion took place on a number of issues related to sickness absence. The Head of Service advised that the policy on absenteeism was being reviewed and that it would be presented to the Committee in due course. Those employees with low levels of absenteeism were to be commended.

The Head of Service also explained the reasons as to why the advertising and selection processes for some posts were “on hold”.

7. Any Other Business – Non-Confidential

There were no items of a non-confidential nature raised.

8. Confidential Report from Director of Finance & Corporate Services

The reasons for confidentiality were as set out in the agenda, ie:-

8.1 Report on Tender Awards

(Confidential for reason of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)).

Redacted report to be available following ratification and signing of contracts.

8.2 Bad Debt Write-Off Request

(Confidential for reason of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)).

Redacted report to be available after full Council meeting on 26th March 2024.

8.3 National Living Wage (NLW) Increase Requests

(Confidential for reason of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)).

Redacted report to be available on the 1st April 2024.

8.4 Provision of Catering and Bar Services at Lagan Valley Island
(Confidential for reason of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)).

Redacted report to be available in March 2025.

8.5 Efficiency Review Steering Group (ERSG) Meetings
(Confidential for reason of information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Council or a Government Department and employees of, or office holders under, the Council.

Redacted report to be available after full Council meeting on 26th March 2024.

In Committee

It was proposed by Councillor R Carlin, seconded by Alderman H Legge and agreed that the Confidential Report of the Director be considered “in Committee”. (Recording was paused at this stage in proceedings and the member of the press left the Chamber.)

8.1 Report on Tender Awards

Presented by the Director of Regeneration & Growth.

It was proposed by Alderman A Ewart, seconded by Councillor A Givan and agreed to recommend that the tenders awarded in regard to the following contracts, together with the attendant tender reports, be noted:-

- T23/24-018 – New meeting room and offices at the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, Lisburn;
- T23/24-025 – Provision of Contract for Welding and Fabrication Services;
- T23/24-013 – Learning Management System;
- T22/23-051 – Framework of Trainers for the Local Government Training Group (LGTG);
- T23/24-026 – Labour Market Partnership 3-Year Strategic Assessment and Annual Action Plan 2024/27.

It was further agreed to recommend that the signing and sealing of the Tender documents be approved.

By way of information, the Director advised that the toilet provision in the Irish Linen Centre/Lisburn Museum was not part of Tender T23/24-018. That issue would be addressed in a report being presented to the appropriate committee in due course.

8.1 Report on Tender Awards Cont'd

The Director also gave an assurance that where only one tender is submitted for a contract, those tenders are – like all other tenders – subjected to detailed scrutiny for Value for Money assessments. What was presented was not a Single Tender Action but was a single return.

8.2 Bad Debt Write-Off Request

Presented by the Head of Finance.

It was proposed by Alderman H Legge, seconded by Councillor R Carlin and agreed to recommend that the debt as set out in the Head of Finance's report be written off.

The Director of Regeneration & Growth left the meeting. (7.05 pm)
Councillor K Dickson left the meeting. (7.06 pm)

8.3 National Living Wage (NLW) Increase Requests

Presented by the Head of Corporate Communications & Administration.

The Head of Service had provided a comprehensive report on this matter, and she also responded to a number of questions thereon.

It was proposed by Councillor N Trimble, seconded by Councillor C Kemp and agreed to recommend that – in order to allow for the continuity of service to be delivered - the requests for increased tender costs for the following contracts be approved as detailed in the Head of Service's report:-

- Provision of Cleaning Services at Designated Council Premises;
- Provision of Caretaker/Receptionist Services at Bradford Court;
- Provision of CCTV/Security/Concierge Provision at Lagan Valley Island.

The Head of Organisation Development & Innovation explained the difference between National Living Wage and Minimum Wage.

8.4 Provision of Catering and Bar Services at Lagan Valley Island

Presented by the Head of Corporate Communications & Administration.

In addition to the narrative report, a revised Financial Appraisal/Business Case for Catering Services had been provided.

The Head of Service clarified an error in the Business Case and confirmed that tenderers could tender for one or both lots.

It was proposed by Councillor K Dickson, seconded by Councillor U Mackin and agreed to recommend that:-

8.4 Provision of Catering and Bar Services at Lagan Valley Island Cont'd

- the revised Financial Appraisal/Business Case for Catering Services at Lagan Valley Island be approved;
- the commencement of a tender process to allow for the provision of catering and bar services at Lagan Valley Island as from the 1st November 2024 be approved.

Councillor K Dickson returned to the meeting during discussion of this matter and prior to any decision. (7.20 pm)

8.5 Efficiency Review Steering Group (ERSG) Meetings

In addition to the narrative report, the minutes of the undernoted meetings of the Efficiency Review Steering Group (ERSG) had been provided:-

- meeting held on the 1st February 2024;
- meeting held on the 5th March 2024.

It was proposed by Councillor U Mackin, seconded by Councillor N Trimble and agreed to recommend that:-

- the minutes of the meetings of the Efficiency Review Steering Group held on the 1st February and 5th March 2024 be noted;
- the recommendation of the Efficiency Review Steering Group in regard to the proposed staffing structure as detailed in the Director's report be approved.

9. Any Other Business – Confidential

There was no other confidential business raised.

Resumption of Normal Business

It was proposed by Councillor N Trimble, seconded by Councillor C Kemp and agreed to come "out of Committee". Normal business and audio recording were resumed.

10. Any Other Business

There were no further items raised.

The meeting concluded at 7.26 pm.

MAYOR/CHAIR