

## **CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the proceedings of the special meeting of Castlereagh Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Castlereagh Borough Council, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB, on Thursday, 21 October 2010, at 7.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor V McCoy  
(in the Chair)

**ALDERMEN:** J Norris MBE  
J White

**COUNCILLORS:** M Copeland  
S Duncan  
C Hall  
B Hanvey  
T Jeffers (from 7.13 pm)  
S Skillen

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Acting Chief Executive (Director of Leisure Services), Director of Technical & Environmental Services, Client Manager, General Manager Leisure & Marketing, Community Services Manager, Environmental Health Manager, Planning Officer and Members' Services Officer

**APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received on behalf of Aldermen Beattie, Henderson MBE and Rice MBE and Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Chambers, Cochrane, Drysdale, Hughes MBE, Long, Robinson, Spratt, Tosh and Walker

### **2010/704 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

Noted.

### **2010/705 : PRESENTATION BY PLAYBOARD RE: PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO ASSIST THE REALISATION OF THE EXECUTIVE'S PLAY & LEISURE POLICY STATEMENT**

The Acting Chief Executive introduced Mr Alan Herron, Director of Services, Playboard, to the meeting. She stated that Playboard was a charitable group which had been appointed by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). A regional implementation plan had been developed, which was now at an advanced stage, and it was envisaged that councils would play a significant role in the delivery of the play plans.

Mr Herron then began his presentation by stating that Playboard was devoted to promoting children's play in Northern Ireland, and the purpose of the presentation

was to provide Members with an update on key policy elements and key areas of the plan.

Mr Herron advised that Playboard had build up a comprehensive research base of leisure activities. Research had shown that being able to engage in play and leisure activities brought many benefits for children and young people, including:

- Positive physical and mental health development
- Improved cognitive skills and creativity
- An improved ability to assess and manage risk
- Cultural Development
- Assisting in breaking down social exclusion
- Possibly a catalyst in the creation of stronger communities

Councillor Jeffers arrived at the meeting at this point, 7.13 pm.

This policy had been developed in light of the fact that children and young people were facing many restrictions and opportunities for play were limited because of the following:

- A lack of accessible places for play and leisure
- Time pressures and constraints associated with modern living
- Increasingly sedentary lifestyles, often exacerbated by the growth of technology

Mr Herron stated that Playboard wanted to raise awareness of the benefits of playing with parents. Furthermore, opportunities for disabled children to have access to play were being investigated. Playboard hoped that a mechanism could be developed to develop play and leisure in communities.

Mr Herron then went on to outline the beginning of Playboard and developments to date. He stated that, at the beginning, the focus had been on the development of play and leisure. There had been no single authority with sufficient resources, therefore it had been clear that development in partnership would be critical, therefore a partnership approach at local level had been established. In Northern Ireland, key developments included the following:

- The establishment of the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2003
- The publication of the ten-year strategy 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge' in 2006
- The development and publication by the NI Executive of the Play and Leisure Statement in 2009
- The development of the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy in 2010

The implementation plan had been developed on a cross-sectoral basis in broad partnership of organisations including the following:

- Government departments

- The Chief Leisure Officer Association
- Key voluntary sector organisations
- Representatives from the education sector
- Representatives from a range of statutory organisations

The views of children and young people had been given importance with regular opportunities to express their views and opinions as the plan was developed to ensure that it would best meet their needs.

Mr Herron stated that the focus of the implementation plan had been on three key areas, the first being Places and Spaces for Play and Leisure, and the plan sought to address the following:

- Planning and Design – to ensure that new developments would adopt child and young person friendly design principles
- The creation of child-friendly public environments to encourage and give opportunities for positive play experiences such as museums, libraries etc
- Enhancement of understanding amongst professionals of ways to influence and shape play and leisure opportunities
- Ways to bring unused, derelict land back into meaningful use as spaces for play and leisure within the community

The second area of focus was Championing Play and Leisure:

- Ensuring that government departments recognised their role in implementing the plan
- Ensuring that children and young people were enabled to participate actively in the development of the plan
- Championing the health and wellbeing benefits of play and leisure
- Support for a strategic approach to the planning and delivery of play and leisure through partnership
- Promoting quality standards within registered provision
- Achieving an embedding of the play and leisure policy in schools and youth provision
- Challenging the risk-averse society that now existed with a view to increasing the extent to which children and young people encountered challenge and risk within their play
- Support for the development of a skilled and qualified workforce within the play and leisure sector

The third area of focus was Access to Play and Leisure:

- Support for children and young people to realise their right to play and leisure as enshrined within the UNCRC
- Raising awareness of the benefits of play and leisure with parents and the wider community
- Enabling children and young people to travel to and access local play and leisure spaces safely

The ultimate goal of the plan was to achieve child and young person friendly communities, and Playboard felt that councils should be at the core of the model,

given their historical input into play and leisure. However, in light of forthcoming significant cuts in public spending, the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy had been developed to take into account that no single authority on its own had the financial resources, personnel capacity or legislative power to implement the plan. The focus was, therefore, on the development of effective partnerships with councils to deliver strategic and operational aspects.

In order to make the best use of available resources, three key elements had been determined and Playboard was proposing the following three key elements in the delivery of the plan:

- Local councils that would take on a lead role
- Local communities
- Children and young people

As councils had traditionally been at the forefront of delivery of play and leisure in local communities, it would be beneficial to build on existing knowledge and expertise. In order to achieve child-friendly communities, it was essential that local communities would be involved in the implementation of the plan and to give them a sense of ownership. Also, it was important that children and young people were involved in matters that would impact on them.

In support of councils in the establishment of play and leisure partnerships, OFMDFM were currently in the process of negotiating a level of support to assist in the realisation of the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy. This would include:

- One-off financial support for councils to initiate the partnership process, including the audit of play and leisure provision, with the extent of financial assistance depending on the number of councils wishing to proceed
- Delivery of Play Shaper, a programme which explores the impact of professionals on play and leisure, which emphasises how investment in play can help to achieve the targets of those working in planning, education, health, regeneration, the voluntary and community sector as well as the police
- Delivery of a series of risk seminars aimed at supporting local play delivery and improving play opportunities
- Access to research data which can assist partnerships with the initial audit process

Mr Herron stated that funding was available until the end of the current financial year. Furthermore, Playboard wanted to make councils aware of the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy and were keen to hear their views.

Following the presentation, Alderman Henderson stated that there would be financial implications for the Council if Members decided to become committed, due to functions being moved to councils from the Executive. He further suggested that some organisations were providing activities for children and young people such as churches, Scouts etc. Furthermore, Alderman Henderson pointed out that each council differed demographically.

Mr Herron explained that the business plan for funding had only been developed in the past two months, therefore it was based on a model of 26 councils and funding of approximately £10,000 for each council.

The Acting Chief Executive stated that in relation to efficiency, working in partnership and gathering and sharing information could only be of benefit to the Council. She added that the Council needed to have baseline information from which to consider the provision of all of its services and, therefore, such information would be extremely useful to the whole Council and not just Leisure Services.

Mr Herron reiterated the importance of effective partnerships. He hoped that the level of commitment to the implementation of the plan would increase. He commented that currently it was not clear how much funding would be available from next year onwards, but other funding sources could be explored, ie Big Lottery. Currently the development of protocols was underway and with the available data to support the auditing process, he felt that this would be sufficient.

Councillor Hanvey commented that this was a scoping process to establish demographics, expectations from communities regarding travel arrangements to and from play and leisure locations. He also pointed out that there was little open space in the Castlereagh area and he enquired whether this was addressed in planning policy, ie that developers be asked to create space and facilities.

Mr Herron stated that there was commitment in planning policy. He further stated that providing access to transport was important. Regarding the development of play and leisure areas in areas with limited space, Playboard intended to liaise with private and public owners with a view to opening up areas, ie through government transfers.

Councillor Jeffers enquired whether children and young people had been consulted. Mr Herron replied that children and young people were encouraged to participate. He stated that they appeared to prefer open spaces to new playgrounds.

Alderman White enquired how far the regional plan had progressed. He was of the view that, in order to link the regional plan with local operational plans, the regional plan would need to be set up first. Mr Herron advised that it was anticipated that the regional plan would receive approval from the Executive in November and should be available at the beginning of 2011.

Councillor Hall stated that schools could be approached, particularly during school holidays. Mr Herron replied that Playboard was currently trying to involve schools. Regarding indoor play areas, Playboard was asking local partnerships to consider how to gain access.

The Chairman thanked Mr Herron for giving his presentation on behalf of Playboard.

**2010/706 : REPORT FROM THE ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE RE: OFMDFM PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO ASSIST THE REALISATION OF THE EXECUTIVE'S PLAY & LEISURE POLICY STATEMENT**

The Acting Chief Executive felt that the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy provided a good opportunity for the Council to consider how best to develop play

and leisure activities for children and young people. She suggested that the Council apply a strategic approach to such needs and use this information from a mapping exercise to help prioritise play areas and identify needs across the whole of the Borough. The Council could then decide how to proceed further.

Councillor McCoy felt that the Play and Leisure Implementation Policy was good in theory, but she raised concerns that the Council would be held responsible to provide funding in the future, particularly in light of the recently announced public spending cutbacks.

Councillor Hanvey agreed that the plan provided a useful exercise in respect of leisure activities to guide the decision-making process of the Council's strategy. He felt the Council should not lose out on this opportunity to gather this information as a useful tool in the future.

The Community Services Manager agreed that this exercise would be very useful and would further support and provide information regarding the development of the Council's new Community Support Plan and other strategies. He highlighted that the document would enable a holistic view to be taken in relation to current resources and issues within local communities. Furthermore, the Community Services Manager also highlighted the potential of funding under the Peace III programme to support the implementation of a Play and Leisure Strategy if it could be demonstrated how it could contribute to the Peace III indicators.

Councillor Copeland enquired whether the work involved in the exercise would be carried out in house or tendered. The Acting Chief Executive replied that it would be a piece of work that would be tendered. However, she stated that it was anticipated that the funding provided by the OFMDFM would be sufficient to cover such a piece of work. She continued to say that she did not foresee additional staff being necessary to carry out the work as this could be done within the partnership, with the work being co-ordinated by an in-house member of staff such as the Planning Officer.

Alderman White reiterated concerns in respect of available funding, particularly if the regional strategy would be delayed. The General Manager Leisure & Marketing replied that funding of £10,000 would be available for each council taking part in the exercise and he felt that the Council would benefit from taking part. Furthermore, should funding from other sources, such as Big Lottery or Sport NI, become available, the case may be that only those councils that had participated would be eligible to access further funding opportunities. He suggested that some of the funding could be used to train staff to use GIS, as GIS mapping would always be available in the future. The General Manager Leisure & Marketing further stated that other groups, such as the Scouts or Surestart, could become involved.

Councillor Duncan commented that this exercise would be a good opportunity for the Council to carry out work that needed to be done anyway at no cost.

Following some further discussion, Alderman White proposed that the Council should proceed with the establishment of a partnership to progress the OFMDFM Play and Leisure Policy, but he felt that NIHE and Housing Associations should become involved as they were the landowners of many suitable areas. Councillor

McCoy added that a caveat should be included that the Council would not commit beyond the availability of funding.

It was proposed by Alderman White, seconded by Councillor Copeland and

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council proceed with the establishment of a partnership to progress the OFMDFM Play and Leisure Policy, provided that there would be no commitment beyond the availability of funding.
- (b) That the Planning Officer be appointed to progress the project as the lead Officer.

The General Manager Leisure & Marketing and the Community Services Manager left the meeting at this point.

The Planning Officer and the Environmental Health Manager joined the meeting at this point.

**2010/707 : BRIEFING BY THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING OFFICER RE: EPIC (ELECTRONIC APPLICATIONS FOR CITIZEN SOLUTIONS)**

The Planning Officer and the Environmental Health Manager provided Members with a Powerpoint presentation regarding ePIC, including a demonstration of the operation of the system and any difficulties. She pointed out the following:

- Information was not visible on the webpage immediately once it was entered
- Access to planning applications was slow and difficult
- Drawings were presented sideways and could not be rotated
- Printouts of drawings were not to scale
- Property searches provided information such as the planning history etc, but there were inconsistencies
- As dates were not kept up to date, it was difficult to ascertain the progress of planning applications
- Applications were not listed chronologically

During the ensuing discussion, Members raised concerns that progression of planning applications through the Planning Service would be very much delayed, particularly in light of further reduction of staff within the Planning Service. Councillor Hanvey felt that the difficulties associated with ePIC could possibly result in interference with Officers' day-to-day responsibilities in Castlereagh Borough Council.

Alderman White suggested that the Council should request information regarding the cost implications of introducing ePIC by way of Freedom of Information.

The Environmental Health Manager advised Members that the practical use of ePIC created a number of problems when responding as a statutory consultee to applications. He added that he intended to brief Members on the consultation

process. He advised that only one drawing or supporting document could be viewed at any one time. He further advised that, if information was required at a site visit, it was now up to the Council to print off the required documentation, as it would no longer be forwarded by the Planning Service. This might require the purchase of a plotter to ensure that Officers could provide accurate consultation. He commented that the Planning Service had transferred planning responsibility to local authorities but provided no financial support.

Councillor McCoy enquired whether Belfast City Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council, the other two councils to pilot ePIC, had made similar complaints regarding the use of the system. The Planning Officer replied that they, too, had encountered many difficulties.

Following some further discussion, it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Planning Officer prepare a guide to the operation of ePIC for Members' information
- (b) That a Freedom of Information request be made in respect of the cost implications associated with the use of ePIC, including the cost associated with Officers' time.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.50 pm.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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MAYOR