

Committee(s)	Dated:
Public Relations and Economic Development Sub Committee – For Information	25 July 2018
Subject: Chairman of Policy & Resources' and Town Clerk's Visit to the North-West of Northern Ireland	Public
Report of: Director of Economic Development	For Information
Report author: William Elliott, EDO	

Summary

This report gives Members a high-level overview of the recent visit that the Policy Chairman and the Town Clerk undertook to Derry-Londonderry and Causeway Coast and Glens, Northern Ireland, on 16 to 17 July 2018.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Policy Chairman visited Derry-Londonderry and Causeway Coast and Glens on 16 to 17 July. The Town Clerk joined for the Derry-Londonderry leg on 16 July.
2. Edward Montgomery, the Secretary of the Honourable the Irish Society, supported throughout.

Derry-Londonderry

3. Derry & Strabane City District Council (DSCDC) and Invest Northern Ireland provided tours of regeneration areas, presentations at Ulster University and the North West Regional College (NWRC), and a dinner with officials and business leaders.
4. The Policy Chairman and Town Clerk also met local political figures informally in the margins.

City Deal

5. There was widespread and universal local unease that, whilst the Government had announced a City Deal for Belfast last Autumn, none had yet been announced for Derry-Londonderry, despite private assurances. With no public announcement, the DSCDC could not begin formal negotiations with Whitehall on the terms of the deal. This means that important local projects, notably the new graduate medical faculty of Ulster University and road improvement which had cross-border backing, were stalled.
6. All underlined local cross-party, cross-community and cross-border support for the City Deal. A mixture of technical and political factors was blamed for the delay with some fears that the Deal was hostage to progress over restoring the Assembly and Brexit, and that the region did not have strong political advocates in Westminster.
7. After the visit the Policy Chairman wrote to Karen Bradley, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to note the City Corporation's support for a City Deal for Derry-Londonderry, and urge an early public announcement to fulfil informal commitments already made.

Business, including Financial and Professional Services

8. The CEO of DSCDC noted that the city had recently secured a major investment in Financial Services, with 300 new jobs anticipated. This investment had been a direct result of contacts he had made in Belfast during the Lord Mayor's visit in October 2017. The new jobs were closely tied to a training partnership with the NWRC, which would offer short tailored graduate courses leading to guaranteed interviews. This was a model successfully piloted by Belfast Met in cyber.
9. A senior official from DSCDC will begin a part-time secondment into EDO in September. He will work on developing the region's offer to financial services investors and supporting the City Corporation's regional strategy.
10. Over dinner, local business leaders expressed concern about Brexit, notably that it brought uncertainty and delayed investment. Cross-border supply chains for goods were crucial, and existing arrangements (eg in ports and shipping) had to be preserved. However, there was overall optimism that cross-border freedom of movement would be secured, to the benefit of business and regional development. There was also some hope that a 'border economy' might create some new business opportunities.

Causeway Coasts and Glens

11. The local council (based in Coleraine, but now a wider regional body) hosted the Policy Chairman for a morning. She met the new Mayor - the first ever from Sinn Fein - the CEO and other officials, political figures and local business leaders.
12. The visit focused on two major economic drivers for the region.
 - a. Firstly the newly constructed Data Centre on the Enterprise Zone. Proximity to the Kevin transatlantic data cable, tax relief through the Enterprise Zone, the technology expertise in the local campus of Ulster University and the equitable climate had all been factors in the investment.
 - b. The Data Centre operator is now seeking clients to fill the facility, and the Council knock-on tech investment in the adjoining Enterprise Zone. Both are targeting financial services firms, including from the City.

13. Finally, the Policy Chairman visited Portrush Golf Course, which will host the British Open in 2019.
14. The venue and surrounding areas will receive £7.5million of public investment in advance of the event, which will see 180,000 visitors. The Open will return twice more to Portrush, and is expected to be a key factor in local regeneration.

Conclusions and Follow-Up

15. The Policy Chairman came away with a conviction that although the Honourable the Irish Society is the best custodian of most of the City Corporation's County Londonderry work, it is also politically right that the Corporation should be seen there regularly, both to balance our relationships with Belfast and to assist the region with a supportive voice in London (e.g. over the City Deal).
16. The Lord Mayor will visit both regions (along with Belfast) in September 2018. Derry-Londonderry will be the focus of the visit, and the Guildhall will host the main banquet and speech.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – 'None'

William Elliott
Economic Development Office

T: 020 7332 3373

E: william.elliott@cityoflondon.gov.uk