

Ref: FOI / 6222

19th February 2026

Freedom of Information Act 2000 Request - Constitutional Change Working Group

I refer to your FOI request and respond as follows:

I submit the following Freedom of Information request in regard to Derry City and Strabane District Council's 'Constitutional Change Working Group':

1. What criteria/constitution does the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' operate under and what is its remit?

Please find attached the Terms of Reference of the Working Group. This document contains details of the Motion that was passed by Council.

2. Since the instigation of a 'Constitutional Change Working Group' by Derry City and Strabane District Council how many times has it met?

The Working Group has met on 11 occasions.

3. I request copy of the Minutes of all meetings of the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' since its inception?

Notes were produced for 7 meetings and are attached. The notes of the last meeting have not been considered by the Working Group and have not been attached.

Derry

C/o Council Offices
98 Strand Road
Derry
BT48 7NN

Strabane

C/o Council Offices
47 Derry Road
Strabane
BT82 8DY

+44 (0) 2871 253 253
info@derrystrabane.com
www.derrystrabane.com

f Derry City & Strabane District Council
@dcsdcouncil

4. What amount and level of Officer support has been afforded to the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' since its inception?

Officer attendee information is provided in the notes to the meetings. Officer resources have been used to prepare for / facilitate these meetings, collate research data and undertake an online consultation.

5. What venue availability has been utilised by the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' since its inception?

Of the 11 Working Group meetings, 5 were held remotely and 6 in the Chamber Guildhall.

6. What research facility has been afforded to the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' since its inception?

Secondary research in respect of relevant data, research and other publications has been facilitated by the Council's Senior Economist. A public consultation was facilitated through the Council's website. An analysis of this primary research was undertaken by Ulster University. The views of local stakeholders have been sought via direct engagement.

7. What financial assistance has the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' received since its inception?

To date, a cost of £3250 has been incurred in analysing the consultation results and providing a presentation to the Working Group. Additional resources of £1500 have been identified to undertake a community engagement scoping exercise. These monies have not yet been spent.

8. Has the 'Constitutional Change Working Group' held any open/public events additional to their normal meeting rota and, if so, have Council Officers assisted in the arrangement of such and have Council facilities been made available for such?

The Council has not yet held any open / public events.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you have rights of review and appeal; these rights consist of two review processes.

Firstly, our internal review procedure is available by contacting:

John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry City and Strabane District Council
98 Strand Road
Derry BT48 7NN
Tel: 028 71253253 or email: john.kelpie@derrystرابane.com

Secondly, you can appeal directly by contacting the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
CHESHIRE SK9 5AF
Tel: 0303 123 1113 (local rate) or email: casework@ico.org.uk

I would however advise that the Information Commissioner has indicated that a review will not be undertaken unless the Council has first had an opportunity to re-consider its decision.

Yours sincerely

Ellen Cavanagh
Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer

Working Group on Irish Unity

Terms of Reference

Background

At the meeting of Derry City and Strabane District Council held on the 29th April 2021 the following Motion was passed with 22 votes in favour, 12 against and 1 abstention:

That this Council recognises that the discussions about a constitutional change is now well underway and this Council has a duty to consult with its ratepayers on this important issue and the implications for the Council area and the wider north-west.

Therefore, calls on the Council to establish a working group on Irish unity and to begin a consultation with ratepayers and community and business representatives and with trade union, climate justice, LGBTQ+, migrant and social justice, all-island health, disability, mental health, rail and other social justice groups to assess views on the issues related to constitutional change.

Purpose

The purpose of the group is to inform and oversee an engagement process to establish the views of a wide range of stakeholders, in the Council area, on issues related to constitutional change and the implications for the Council area.

The group will play a key role in:

- Identifying relevant sources of information / stakeholders that can inform the development, roll out, analysis and dissemination of relevant information;
- Engaging, as necessary, with representative groups and other stakeholders to inform the approach and design of the engagement / consultation process;
- Initially engaging and informing an analysis on broad economic, environmental and social impacts

- Helping to identify any barriers to engagement and appropriate mitigation measures;
- Identifying implications for the Council area and the wider north-west
- Lobbying for funding and identifying funding opportunities
- Disseminating the results of the engagement / consultation process.
- Engaging with political representatives, where required, on a regional, sub regional and cross border basis;

Membership

This Working Group is open to all Elected Members of Derry City and Strabane District Council. As required, external stakeholders will be invited to participate, present or contribute to meetings.

Values

The activities of the Working Group are underpinned by the following values:

Inclusion and Diversity

The potential for constitutional change is a matter which impacts on every citizen, and organisation within the Council area and beyond. At its simplest level, it affects policy, processes and relationships between countries, trading partners, businesses, communities and individual citizens.

As the focus of this Working Group is to capture and collate the views of local people on the issue of the Unity of Ireland, the Members of the Working Group are committed to an inclusive process, in which all views are sought / elicited, explored and considered. In doing so there is a commitment to embrace difference and value the contributions of all participants, whatever their characteristics or backgrounds are.

Where people are reluctant to contribute to this process proactive efforts will be made to engage and seek views.

All communications will comply with the Council's Code of Practice on Producing Information.

Collaboration

In order to share resources and learning, improve processes and engage effectively, the Working Group will strive to engage with partner councils /organisations and funders.

Building Consensus

The working Group is committed to co- design / inclusion in developing its approach to engagement. There is recognition that ownership of the outcomes is based on clear communications with stakeholders, co-design, respect and informed analysis.

Values



Meetings, support and reporting arrangements

A project plan will be prepared and the group will meet on a regular basis to deliver on the Motion.

Subject to Members' comments, the Working Group will be facilitated by the Chief Executive (or nominee) and Officer support provided, as required. Additional external resources will be procured, as necessary.

The Working Group is not a decision –making body and will report, if required, to the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee.

Budget

To be determined

Lifespan

The Working Group will be wound up once its purpose has been achieved.

Unity Working Group – Notes / Action list

26th July 2021

Attendees: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED],
[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

Officers: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Apologies: [REDACTED]

Item	Actions/(Resp officer)
Terms of Reference	
Terms of reference were agreed. Noted that may evolve over time.	Update draft to reflect regular meetings [REDACTED]
Useful to have some structure around frequency of meetings.	Next meeting mid / late Sept.
North West Development Group	
Suggested that the Development Group may be a natural home to progress work of [REDACTED]. Noted that a Member may need to introduce/ propose and discussion held on how could be operationalised.	
Research	
Overview provided of previously circulated report prepared by [REDACTED]	
Discussion points	
What is to be consulted on, how to engage with broadest range of opinion.	Work to be progressed on content of consultation, channels and target groups
Suggestion that there should be a snapshot of perspectives including from political arena; and that group should focus on micro / local issues for example the impacts in this area, what would be the implications of removal of barriers between Derry and Donegal mean. Focus on relevant resident/stakeholder views on potential direction of travel – potentially localised citizen assembly approach, on cross jurisdictional basis. Working Group could also provide views on macro issues e.g. voting age. Noted that some macro issues are defined by Good Friday Agreement.	
Noted that there are different political views on what a different Ireland would look like.	

See as opportunity to shape constitutional change, welcome all and alternate views, map out a road map to unity, try and encourage conversation, readiness of council area	
Way Forward - Elements – starting a conversation, hearing different voices, inclusive, NW citizen assembly approach, how would consult/engage, provide information in the first instance before consulting in a balanced manner, conduit and catalyst for conversation, widen to Donegal and beyond , open up sessions where views can be shared	
Production of report	
Potential report on impact of unification on our Region, incorporating environmental, societal and economic impacts, Present back as principles, actions and pathway.	
Problems noted on availability of research evidence at a local level	
Facilitation	
Noted that facilitation may be required.	To be considered and agreed in advance
Meeting Schedule	To be developed and circulated

Unity Working Group – Notes / Action list

29 September 2021

Attendees: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Officers: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Apologies: [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Item	Actions/(Resp officer)
Notes of previous meeting Proposed by [REDACTED] seconded by [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Terms of reference Members confirmed general agreement with the Terms of Reference, noting that they may evolve over time. It was also noted that in future, papers would be taken forward to Governance and Strategic Planning committee in relation to taking forward pieces of work. Version control details to be added to the terms of reference document.	[REDACTED]
Research Documents The [REDACTED] provided Members with an overview of the research documents collated to date. In particular, he noted the differences in economic growth patterns in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the evolution of a Belfast -Dublin corridor and the challenges facing the North West. He further highlighted areas of divergence in approach to sustainability and climate change between Derry and Donegal, differing water quality standards, approaches to infrastructure, spatial planning and service delivery. He noted the difference in approach in the two jurisdictions to the census and that for large areas of activity there was limited data. He highlighted that the research could be used to help identify issues for consideration by the working group and the challenge of engaging with large sections of the community.	

Discussion on Potential Way Forward The discussion paper was presented by the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] noted that was important to keep collating the research material and that there would be the opportunity to wait for the Census information. He noted that it was important not to limit the conversations with stakeholders and to engage with the PUL community so as to bring all views into the consultation process. Possible approaches that could be considered would include citizen's hearings, submissions, audio, surveys, etc - ultimately the aim was to elicit as many views as possible. It was suggested that at some point a Motion may evolve to bring forward a dialogue, potentially through a recognised forum that would enable people to put their views. There may also be a published document which set out the key points or alternatively a repository of information so that people could inform their own views. Elements of the iterative process could also include the submission of papers or questions, and sharing of views. [REDACTED] indicated that he was in favour of a citizen assembly approach which brought communities together to discuss matters. The [REDACTED] suggested that a discussion paper would be brought forward to help develop the engagement structure. Elements of the structure would include virtual dialogues, citizens' assembly, continuing research and repository of research evidence.	[REDACTED]
Library The [REDACTED] advised that the research documents shared with the Working Group were currently available in the Members Library via Mod.Gov (app and web). [REDACTED] suggested that this facility should be made open to the public.	[REDACTED]
Any other business It was noted that Donegal County Council may be establishing a similar working group and that the matter would need to be raised at the North West Development Group so as to mandate officers to work together	[REDACTED]
Date of next meeting: Approximately 4-6 weeks	

Unity Working Group

Notes / Action list of Meeting held on 23 November 2021

Attendees: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Officers: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Apologies: none recorded

Item	Actions/(Resp officer)
Notes of Previous Meeting	
The notes of the meeting held on 29 Sep 21 were proposed by [REDACTED] and agreed.	
Donegal County Council	
[REDACTED] queried what was Donegal County Council's position with regard to the progression of a similar motion. [REDACTED] advised that he would make contact and update all members of the council on any conversation with Donegal.	[REDACTED]
Research Update	
All-Ireland Economic Modelling Project [REDACTED] provided members with details of the project. This development was welcome by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] provided further details on other research papers including 2 prepared by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] noted that a substantial body of research had been amassed and that work will be progressed to make this more accessible. [REDACTED] would continue to collate relevant research materials for Member consideration.	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Engagement Methodology	
[REDACTED] noted that whilst information on the Shared Island approach was useful, this Working Group should not mirror the work of that particular model. He noted that the remit of the Shared Island unit was to focus on reconciliation rather than constitutional change. [REDACTED] noted that rather than mirroring the approach, it was possible to learn from it and adapt the models of engagement used for the council area or a wider northwest area.	

He suggested that, subject to Member's views, the engagement be structured along 3 themes and that a series of subtopics could also be identified.

██████████ indicated that he had no objection to the three themes and was keen to promote a dialogue about the constitutional future of the island of Ireland and to engage as many people as possible. He noted the importance of political leaders in opening up conversations on the impacts of constitutional change.

██████████ noted that his preference that the engagement was not through an online forum and suggested that in the New Year a hybrid approach, including the capacity to make submissions could be considered.

It was further suggested that a link up with Donegal CC would be positive given the practical issues associated with constitutional change - specifically how it would impact on people living in the area and what preparations Council would need to make.

██████████ indicated that a facilitated approach could be provided, with a research being categorised into each of the thematic areas. This research would help build capacity and inform the dialogue/ panel discussions / questions and queries.

He noted that a budget and engagement with experts would be required, if this was the desired approach

██████████ suggested that an alternative may be a citizen assembly approach and/or an approach similar to that held for the marriage equality legislation in the Republic of Ireland.

██████████ indicated that two or more approaches could be considered.

██████████ noted that he was not against the citizens' assembly but was unclear of how it would be rolled out in the council area. He further stressed that all voices needed to be heard and that alternative access arrangements may need to be put in place.

It was also commented that some work could possibly be advanced using internal resources, examples highlighted included community development and good Relations officers.

It was however noted that such an engagement would require organisation and time and therefore a budget, and could not be facilitated effectively using internal resources alone.

██████████ suggested that it is possible to look at a hybrid model and work could be progressed in terms of identifying timeframes, costs and mechanisms for delivery including investigating the citizens' assembly approach.

██████████ highlighted that the citizens' assembly model had been raised previously and that the marriage equality engagement had provided a means of canvassing public opinion. He suggested that a hybrid of these approaches would represent an effective methodology for gathering information.

██████████ advised that officers would reflect on guidance and consideration given to bringing forward an approach.



Unity Working Group

Notes / Action list of Meeting held on 28 February 2022

Attendees: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

Officers: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Apologies: none recorded

Item	Actions/(Resp officer)
Notes of Previous Meeting	
The notes of the meeting held on November 21 were agreed.	
Donegal County Council	
[REDACTED] provided an update regarding Donegal County Council's progression of a similar motion. Action: Updates to be provided, when available.	[REDACTED]
Presentation: Engagement Approaches and Proposed Way Forward	
The [REDACTED] provided a presentation covering • Public participation spectrum • Informal and formal participation approaches and tools • Design Parameters for a structured approach • Design Issues: Potential Barriers • Way forward Action: Request to circulate presentation to all Members Members highlighted the need to empower citizens and develop capacity, and the potential for open engagement as well as more formal and focussed approaches. Attention was drawn to ensuring wide participation and encouraging citizens to share their views and experiences. Promotion could initially be aimed at a wide ranging audience, and potentially at a later stage, being more focussed / targeted. Members raised concerns about telephone engagement as there was the risk of abusive behaviours. It was highlighted that the overall engagement process may include multiple phases, incorporating a range of approaches. It was important that views were not excluded and that the engagement process should be as accessible as possible.	[REDACTED]

Reference was made to wider conversations / collaborations with organisations such as Donegal County Council and the Friendship Alliance with Cork Action: It was agreed that a paper be drafted for consideration by the Working Group prior to submission to the [REDACTED]. This paper would address the work done to date, engagement considerations and initial way forward with timeline	[REDACTED]
Research Update	
[REDACTED] provided [REDACTED] with details of the current research projects, work being progressed by NESC and the award of research grants. It was noted Census 2021 results would be available on a phased basis from June 2022 onwards. Reference was made to organisations such as Ireland Futures – a border poll organisation who were conducting research associated with constitutional change. Action: Officers would continue to collate relevant research materials for Member consideration.	[REDACTED]
Library Resources	
An update on the contents of the Members Library of resources was provided. Members highlighted the need for public access to information resources. Action: Resources to be made available to the public.	[REDACTED]

Working Group on Irish Unity – 31st May 2024 at 11am in the Council Chamber.

In Attendance:

and

Apologies:

and

Terms of Reference

Working group established and terms of reference agreed.

Agreed that it would look at ways in which to build capacity and develop materials to inform people on the issue of constitutional change.

Website established with all the documentation for people to read and inform themselves on the issue.

Embarked on an extensive engagement with the public – very active participation – over 200 responses all of which have been collated and shared with the group.

Synopsis of the findings identifying key themes presented to members at the January meeting - 200 responses, over 20k words – issues around the economy, health and education, challenges and concerns outlined.

Next way forward purpose of the meeting today

provided update in relation to two recent studies – one by at Trinity and a German economist who produced a paper over 3 mths ago which in turn saw the publication of an alternative view research piece by a – rebutted the earlier research.

provided an overview of some of the stats and themes included in the research and also research done by Stranmillis College and Queens.

Education and how there is a sea change over the past number of years – the grammar system here is only working for those within it – education retention in the ROI is 15% higher than in the north – ROI system seen to be better at retaining students and providing opportunities.

Health system and the advantages in cooperation between north and south a big issue and how this can be developed.

Trinity College research suggested it could cost up to £20 billion – including cost of pensions, salary levels, health care and benefits. £220 for an unemployed single person in ROI as compared with £72 in the North.

DCU research estimates costs would only be in the region of £2 to £3 billion – more gradual process in their opinion – see a period of transition rather than what happened in East and West Germany and how it took 30 years for this to integrate.

All the research also identifies the positives of change and a unified approach to roads infrastructure, planning etc.

– if I was to vote tomorrow I would be voting Yes despite what any research says – I see this as a new Ireland – ROI will have to change – it can no longer sustain itself as a tax haven for US companies. The ROI housing and health provision is not something we want to continue

in an all island Ireland – need to be focusing our research on how Ireland can become a self sufficient nation that doesn't rely on US companies and international investment.

██████████ – Citizens Assembly is how ██████ see this campaign developing and giving people a forum to share their views ahead of a referendum. Important we look at next steps and in line with the motion engage with all groups to get their views. Important that the info from the online questionnaire and engagement process is published and promoted as part of a comms piece so people can see it. Need to compile list of consultees. Important part of that engagement is to identify the core themes.

██████████ explained that the consultation resulted in 200 replies – over 20k words – not a good idea to publish as raw material – best practice to get someone from ██████ for example to scope it out – analyse the data and provide us with a report that we can then use as publicity material to share etc. she said there would be a cost to this of around £3k or so.

██████████ from a comms perspective better for us to have an independent evaluation of the data that can then be developed into some PR and comms – it will assist with the messaging.

██████████ suggested that similar to what officers do for committee reports someone would look at the data and collate a report to committee that members could analyse?

██████████ said she didn't think an overview gave justice to the effort put into this by the respondents and an independent review was preferred option.

██████████ clarified that ██████ reviewing this wouldn't make it an academic report it would be information based on a quantitative analysis software. He warned against publishing raw data and the weighted value of each contributor.

██████████ asked that in any report that comes to ██████ it includes a list of consultees and schedule of engagement. Need to invite some of those stakeholder groups into a room to talk to us - important we get the unionist community involved it's unfortunate that the unionist political end does not take part in the working group.

██████████ gave advice on consultation groups and risks associated with section 75 and sectoral engagement.

██████████ said trade union movement is across all ages, religious etc backgrounds – very inclusive sector to engage with.

██████████ highlighted the areas unique geographic location and how our views here will be difficult to those in other areas

██████████ expressed concern on the focus on city and not rural communities and important this is included in the way forward. Asked if there was any analysis in the consultation to look at if respondents were from wider Council area.

██████████ reiterated these comments and said these conversations are happening across the country and its important we have data and views that reflect the wishes of people in our Council area not just city. Also need to engage with Donegal CC

Agreed that a paper is to come before [REDACTED] that provides an update on work of the group so far – propose that an independent qualitative analysis is done of the data to capture the results into a report we can use.

Recommend that we engage with those involved in the local economy as a first step in the consultation process to gauge what their views are. Initially invite them to submit their views and also invite them to potentially present their views to the working group. Other themes to follow.

Draft paper to be circulated to the group to review.

Notes from Constitutional Change/Irish Unity Working Group Meeting

Tue 24 September 2024 – 2.00pm – 3.20pm

██████████ volunteered to chair.

The Chair explained background to the Motion. Updated that there had been a good response to the online public consultation. Responses were being collated. This round of engagements with key stakeholders is the second phase of the Council's preparatory work around potential constitutional change. The Member Working Group was keen to hear the views of stakeholders on the key issues that need to be considered or addressed. The meeting was primarily an opportunity for Members to listen and get feedback/Views from those present.

In response to ██████ question – “what does constitutional change mean?” the Chair clarified that the Working Group was set up following the passing of the Motion to plan/prepare for the eventuality of a new constitutional arrangement. It was accepted that this would be a long consultative process. At this stage, stakeholders are not expected to state a position but he hoped that organisations would start having conversations. Also clarified that individual stakeholders are not expected to declare their personal position.

██████████ expressed disappointment that there was no Trade Union representation at the meeting as TU movement is an important civic group. The Chair agreed that the ██████ would discuss how to ensure engagement with a wider group of stakeholders later in the meeting.

The stakeholders present introduced themselves and each was invited to give an overview of the issues that impact their organisation/service users, etc.

██████████ advised that the Trust did not have a formal position on Irish Unity/constitutional change. He outlined several examples of ongoing cross-border cooperation around health provision. A key concern for the Trust as a border area employer/service provider is the pay differential for healthcare staff North and South. Key services struggle to attract and retain suitably qualified staff. The health service is structured very differently but both regions are experiencing difficulties in meeting demand, increasing cost of services, etc.

██████████ stated that she personally would be in favour of constitutional change but she is conscious that this is not the position for all sections of the community. Her main focus/concern is about health inequalities and the problems currently experienced by the community and voluntary sector (lack of consistent funding, reduced funding, filling gaps due to diminishing public services, lack of job security, etc). Would hope that Irish unity would bring more funding for the community and voluntary sector. Concerned that Council needs to work to get those who are

currently opposed to consider the benefits that unity may bring – tell a positive story, etc.

██████████ said she doesn't have a personal position on the matter and she was there to represent the interests of her Members and Board. The ██████████ remit is to support member businesses and advocate for businesses in the region. There is already a lot of cross-border cooperation between ██████████ and ██████████. Members are experiencing lots of barriers/issues including Brexit implications, staffing problems (recruitment, working from home, benefits packages, etc), differential tax regimes in the two regions, etc.

There are lots of examples of strategic cooperation between business community and tertiary education sector. ██████████ sees the Council area as in a unique position, given its border location, to capitalise on closer cooperation.

██████████ said her main concern is the potential impact on Visit Derry businesses and the tourism sector. Many Visit Derry members already operate cross-border and ██████████ works with both Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland. She is also concerned about jobs and recruitment, education, skills for young people and was disappointed at no ██████████ presence at the meeting.

The Chair posed the question "With unification would come re-entry to the European Union. What would this mean for stakeholders? Would it have benefits?"

██████████ – For businesses, Irish unity could have advantages as it would mean a level playing field (tax regimes, etc). However, there could be some negative implications if it would revoke the Windsor Framework which currently gives businesses the best of both worlds. Exiting Europe caused problems for businesses but the Windsor Framework has helped.

██████████ – Well known that leaving Europe caused problems with accessing medicines, recruitment, etc so rejoining Europe may help with that. However, he wanted to reflect on this question.

██████████ – community and voluntary sector would welcome anything that will bring funding/ensure sustainability for the sector.

██████████ – rejoining Europe/Irish Unity may be beneficial – could have a positive impact on wages for example.

██████████ – expressed a view about how Europe might look in future and whether in fact those who had voted to remain might even want to re-join a very different Europe. The ROL corporation tax system is not sustainable. He commented that Derry Chamber might not have a position yet on Irish unity but expected they have discussed corporation tax.

██████████ commented that NI businesses look jealously at the tax system in the South and convergence would be welcome as NI currently can't compete for foreign direct

investment. However, she also agreed that the current situation in RoI was not sustainable long term.

██████████ commented that it was clear that many more conversations have to happen, disappointed about the absence of some key stakeholders (eg, ██████████) and the ██████████ has a very important role to play. Asked that ██████████ take back to her Board the message that Council is keen to hear the views of the ██████████.

██████████ asked what conversations had taken place to date among stakeholder constituencies.

██████████ – admitted no conversations at all to date but she would also raise with her Board.

██████████ – the Western Trust hasn't had any formal discussions either but he would raise with senior management too.

██████████ acknowledged that the conversation is only starting; that health is a key employer in both jurisdictions and merging two health systems would be a massive challenge and extensive engagement will be necessary.

██████████ suggested if Council is planning a second round of engagement that steps are taken to brief participants about the background to this initiative and what to expect from a meeting.

The Chair thanked stakeholders for their input and agreed that the meeting would discuss how to better engage and maximise stakeholder participation. An outcome from this meeting was confirmation that external stakeholders do not have Irish Unity/constitutional change as a priority at present although there is plenty of ongoing cross border communication and collaboration.

Following the departure of the 4 stakeholders, there was a discussion about next steps and how to engage in future.

██████████ confirmed that invitations had been issued from the ██████████ to all the partners/stakeholders involved in Community Planning Partnership. The initial invitation had been followed up by email. A number of invitees had sent apologies - that the date didn't suit; others had not responded as 'out of office' replies had been received; and one person declined to be involved.

The Chair said it would be necessary to organise another meeting targeting those who did not attend this meeting. Suggested Council issue more information in advance and make clear that we are not seeking confirmed corporate positions at this stage, merely providing an opportunity to explore issues, get views, etc.

Someone suggested that perhaps stakeholders could be surveyed – the Chair wasn't in favour of another survey at this stage.

It was suggested that perhaps Council could guide the engagement by posing specific questions. Suggested that Members should attempt to prompt discussion and encourage stakeholders to engage.

████████████████████ – suggested we need to be clear in communication with stakeholders – something like: “In the event of a change to the status quo, what would be the challenges, issues...?” Commented on similarities with the situation when East and West Germany merged and that much academic work had been done through the Shared Ireland initiative. However, it must be recognised that there are specific issues for the people of the North West that need to be considered.

██████████ commented that all the stakeholders mentioned that this was a difficult conversation for many people/groups and we need to be sensitive to that. Can Council learn from other jurisdictions, eg, Scotland’s referendum on independence? She was surprised that more organisations are not yet having formal discussions, given the impact of Brexit and the growing inevitability of a Border poll on unity. Commented that there is a lot of misinformation about things like how the health system operates in RoI.

██████████ – Council must be a positive advocate for a united Ireland. People from a unionist community background in particular are reticent about even discussing the issue. Feels the role of this Working Group is 1) to help Council prepare for potential constitutional change and 2) to educate the public about what they should be talking about and providing factual information to help them decide their position.

██████████
████████████████████

Irish Unity Working Group

24th February 2025

In Attendance:- [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed [REDACTED] [REDACTED] of the [REDACTED] who had been appointed by the Group to complete an Analysis Consultation on the Council's public call for evidence regarding constitutional change. The results of this analysis were presented to the Working Group under five themes:

- Theme 1: Support for Irish Unity
- Theme 2: Economic and Infrastructural Development
- Theme 3: Governance and Political Reform
- Theme 4: Social Justice and Historical Grievances
- Theme 5: Concerns and Opposition to Change.

The Group thanked [REDACTED] for his professional and clear analysis and requested a copy of the presentation for information.

[REDACTED] outlined a live dashboard developed by members of [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] University which provides data for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and advised he will circulate the link for the website. [REDACTED] advised that the link is on the Agenda.

[REDACTED] referred to the draft paper circulated to the Group and to be presented at GSP and asked if there were any comments/amendments?

Discussion took place regarding circulating the Report to the wider public and it was suggested that

- A press release is prepared
- The Report is uploaded to the Council's website
- Another workshop is arranged and Organisations such as Community Groups, Trade Unions, Education, Social Justice and Section 75 Groups be invited. These Organisations can be given the option to reply in writing.
- It was also suggested that a third phase of engagement with the community be completed.

Following lengthy discussion, it was suggested that at the next meeting of the Working Group, a list of invitees be compiled, that questions and information be considered alongside the format of the Workshop. This information should be provided in advance to the list of attendees.

It was noted that it would be useful to have examples of how other Countries had progressed in the same situation.

[REDACTED] noted that a Citizens Assembly is how [REDACTED] see this developing as representative for all citizens.

