

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 21st September, 2007

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor D. Dodds (Chairman);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Kirkpatrick); and
Councillors D. Browne, M. Browne, W. Browne, Convery,
Crozier, Hanna, Kirkpatrick, Lavery, Long, Maginness,
P. Maskey, McCann, Newton, Rodway, Smyth and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Improvement;
Mr. C. Quigley, Director of Legal Services;
Mr. T. Salmon, Director of Corporate Services;
Mr. L. Steele, Head of Committee and Members'
Services; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Councillors Adamson and Hartley.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd September.

Financial Matters

Tenders for the Supply and Delivery of Annual Supplies

The Committee granted approval for the commencement of tendering exercises in respect of the following:

- (i) the provision of bottled water and mains-fed water services for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2011;
- (ii) the supply of broken stones and screenings for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2009;
- (iii) the supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2011;

- (iv) the hire of machinery and motor tipping lorries for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2011;
- (v) the provision of travel services for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2013;
- (vi) the supply and delivery of electrical supplies and lamps for the period 1st April, 2008 till 31st March, 2011;
- (vii) the supply and delivery of office supplies and computer consumables for the period 1st February, 2008 till 31st March, 2010.

2007 Executive Review of Rating Reform

The Committee was reminded that the new domestic rating system, which was based on capital values, had been introduced in April, 2007. In June, the Minister of Finance and Personnel had announced a short-term review of the system with a twelve week consultation period ending on 31st August. Given that the review period had covered the summer holiday period, the Director of Corporate Services had commissioned the Institute of Revenue, Rating and Valuation to prepare a draft response on behalf of the Council. The Committee was reminded further that, at its meeting on 17th August, it had agreed that the draft response to the Rating Review be circulated to the Party Groups and a Briefing Session for the Committee be held on 29th August. The Members who had attended the Briefing Session had made a number of comments and these had been incorporated into the final response - a copy of which was available on the Members' Portal - which had been forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Committee approved the Council's response to the Review of Rating Reform.

Belfast Castle Wall – Refurbishment

The Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 13th September, had accepted the most advantageous tender received in respect of the refurbishment of the Belfast Castle Wall. However, the anticipated cost of the project was now £216,720 compared to an amount of £155,000 which had been included in the Capital Programme. Therefore, since the increase in the cost of the project was in excess of 10% of the approved amount, Financial Regulation D9 required the approval of the additional expenditure to be ratified by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

After discussion, the Committee approved the additional expenditure associated with the refurbishment of the Belfast Castle Wall.

Political Processes and Members' Issues

**Political Nominations to the Belfast District
Policing Partnership and its Sub-Groups**

The Committee considered the undernoted report in respect of political nominations to the Belfast District Policing Partnership and its Sub-Groups:

“Relevant Background Information

The Council is required, under Schedule 3 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 as amended by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003 and by the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Bill, to establish the Belfast DPP and its 4 Sub-Groups before the expiration of a 3-month period following the Commencement Date for the legislation on 4th September, 2007. The Council must make the appointments so as to reflect the strength of the Parties on the Council.

The Council has received written confirmation from the Northern Ireland Policing Board that the current political membership of the District Policing Partnership and its 4 Sub-Groups does not reflect the political composition of the Council. Accordingly, it will be necessary for the Council to make new political appointments based upon the principal of proportionality.

Key Issues

**Appointment of Political Members to the
Principal DPP and its 4 Sub-Groups**

The Council, in 2003, agreed to appoint a 19 Member Principal DPP with 10 political and 9 independent Members. In addition, the legislation at Section 2 (1) – (3) of Schedule 3A of the 2000 Act (as amended by the 2003 Act) requires each Sub-Group to be comprised of 11 Members, 6 political and 5 independent.

A meeting was held with the Party Group leaders on 29th August and the following political composition of the DPP and its 4 Sub-Groups was agreed using the Council's system of proportionality:

**Principal District Policing Partnership –
10 Political Members**

Sinn Féin	2
Democratic Unionist Party	2
Ulster Unionist Party	1
Alliance	1

Plus the Chairman of each of the four Sub-Groups which will comprise one representative from each of the Sinn Féin, Democratic Unionist, Ulster Unionist and Social Democratic and Labour Party Groupings.

At the meeting on 29th August, the leader of the PUP Grouping (Councillor Smyth) asked if it would be possible for the Council to adopt an appointments process so as to ensure that all of the Political Groupings on the Council, including the Progressive Unionist Party, would be represented on the Principal Partnership. An undertaking was given to check the position with the Director of Legal Services and to report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Director of Legal Services has confirmed that the former Policy and Resources, at its meeting on 23rd March, 2001, agreed to implement the Council's proportionality principles for appointments to outside bodies and these arrangements had been applied to the political nominations to the District Policing Partnership when it had first been established in September, 2002. These arrangements do not provide for a place on the Principal DPP as of right for the Progressive Unionist Party due to the fact that it has 2 Members only on the Council. That Party could only be represented on the principal Partnership if one of the other Party Groupings which is allocated a place(s) were willing to offer one of their places to the Progressive Unionist Party. It should be borne in mind that the Progressive Unionist Party will be allocated 1 place on the Sub-Groups which is in line with its strength on the Council.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board is of the opinion that it would be beneficial, in order to enhance the overview function of the Principal District Policing Partnership, if those political Members appointed to the Principal Partnership were also to be appointed to one Sub-Group. However, it should be borne in mind that the legislation has been established so as to maximise the number of representatives, both political and independent, sitting on the Principal Partnership and the four Sub-Groups. It is, of course, a matter for each Party Grouping as to whether they wish to appoint an individual Member to more than one place or to spread their available places amongst different Members.

**Sub-Group Members - 6 Political Members
on each of 4 Sub-Groups (24 places)**

The breakdown of the total number of political places amongst the Party Groups is Sinn Féin Party 7, Democratic Unionist Party 6, Ulster Unionist Party 4, Social Democratic and Labour Party 4, Alliance Party 2, Progressive Unionist Party 1.

Since both Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Parties have a proportionate figure of 6.59, the 24th place will be rotated between the two Groups with Sinn Féin having the additional place initially. The leaders agreed the undernoted distribution:

<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>West</u>
2 SF 1 DUP 1 UU 1 SDLP 1 All	2 SF 2 DUP 1 UU 1 SDLP	1 SF 2 DUP 1 UU 1 SDLP 1 All	2 SF 1 DUP 1 UU 1 SDLP 1 PUP

Chairman of the Principal DPP

Under the legislation, the position of Chairman of the principal DPP is to be rotated amongst the 4 largest Parties represented on the Council.

Accordingly, in the 4-year term, the position of Chairman would be held in turn by the Sinn Fein, Democratic Unionist, Ulster Unionist and Social, Democratic and Labour Parties.

Chairmanships of the Sub-Groups

	<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>West</u>
Year One	UU	SDLP	DUP	SF
Year Two	SDLP	DUP	SF	UU
Year Three	SF	UU	SDLP	DUP
Year Four	DUP	SF	UU	SDLP

For any particular Sub-Group there is a requirement that the Chairmanship will be held in turn by the 4 largest Parties on the Council during the 4-year term. Therefore, in any year each of the SF, DUP, UU and SDLP will have a Chairman of a Sub-Group and, as mentioned earlier, that person will hold a seat on the principal DPP for that year.

Resource Implications

Financial

A decision on the allowances payable to Members of the Belfast District Policing Partnership and its Sub-Groups have not yet been finalised with the Northern Ireland Policing Board. This information will be forwarded to the Party Groups when it has been received.

As with all expenditure incurred by the DPP, the Council will be responsible for meeting 25% of the costs of Members' Allowances.

Human Resources

None.

Asset and Other Implications

None.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. **Agrees the composition of the political appointments to the Belfast District Policing Partnership and its 4 Sub-Groups as set out in the report;**
2. **Notes that the names of the individual Party nominations will be submitted to the Council meeting on 1st October for formal ratification; and**
3. **Agrees that the Political Appointment Date for the new arrangements will be 1st October, 2007.**

Key to Abbreviations

DPP – District Policing Partnership”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Implementation of Modern.Gov System

The Members were reminded that, since the last update report to the Committee, work had been ongoing to backload the new Modern.Gov System with minutes from 1997 and with reports generated since the Annual Council meeting held in June, with the testing of the system continuing with the assistance of ISB. A briefing had been held for Members on 8th May, at which the introduction of the system had been welcomed, with Members requesting that appropriate information and training be provided as the implementation of the system was rolled out. In addition, the first meeting of the Inter-Departmental Users' Group had been held on 27th June and, again, Departmental representatives had welcomed the introduction of a more user-friendly and effective system for recording and tracking Council decisions.

The Head of Committee and Members' Services explained that it was important to note that one of the main advantages of the system was that it allowed for the simultaneous publication of information to both internal customers via an intranet and external customers and the public via the internet. Currently, the public could view only the minutes of Committee meetings after they had been ratified at the monthly Council meeting. They were not permitted to view Committee agendas and could only see those reports included within the minutes. However, the direction of public policy was to make public as much information on the decision-making process as possible and a policy shift to making reports public would be in line with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency in its decision-making process.

Accordingly, he recommended that Committee reports, excluding those which the Council could justify being withheld, be made available on the Internet at the same time as the minutes of the meetings were published, that is, following the Monthly Meetings of the Council. He pointed out that it would be necessary for some protocols to be developed to guide Officers in identifying valid reasons for excluding particular reports from publication. Draft protocols in this regard would be developed in conjunction with the Director of Legal Services and a report would be submitted to the Committee in due course for consideration.

The Committee agreed to publish Committee Agendas and Reports following the monthly meeting of the Council, subject to the submission to a future meeting of the Committee of a report on the protocols in relation to the withholding of particular reports.

Irish Council for Social Housing – Biennial National Social Housing Conference

The Committee was advised that the Irish Council for Social Housing had issued an invitation to the Council to be represented at the Biennial National Social Housing Conference which would take place in Wexford town from 25th till 27th September. The Head of Committee and Members' Services outlined the themes which would be discussed and referred to a number of the experts who would be in attendance at the Conference.

Accordingly, given the role which Members had in representing their constituents in matters relating to housing and the increasing concerns around the affordability of housing in Northern Ireland which had been documented in the recent review undertaken by Sir John Semple, the Committee agreed to authorise the attendance at the Conference of one representative of each of the Party Groupings on the Council and approved the payment of the appropriate travelling and subsistence allowances in connection therewith.

Feedback from Members' Away-Day

The Chief Executive submitted a report providing details of the key issues which had been discussed at the Members' away-day which had been held on 22nd and 23rd August. He stated that feedback from the Members had suggested that those present had found the session valuable in terms of engaging with the leadership role which the Committee would play in terms of strategic planning and as the beginning of a real discussion about ambition, strategy, culture and behaviour within the Council. The Members had given some very clear messages about the future – not necessarily limited to individual actions and priorities – but about identifying priorities, making a difference in the City and leaving a legacy for future generations.

Chief Officers would now support Members to not only determine high level objectives to take the Council from 2008 and beyond but also to agree the values and principles which would underpin the manner in which the organisation would conduct itself. In order to do this, a number of steps had been identified, the key actions of which included:

- September 27th and 28th – John Huish, Improvement and Development Agency Peer Member, who had facilitated the August away-days, to carry out workshops with the Political Parties to explore further some of the priorities identified by the Members at the away-days and to explore the issue of Member/Officer roles and relationships;
- October – Parties to discuss the outcome of the away-days and Party Group briefings to be held in order to allow Members to refine the definition of the priorities discussed at the away-days. The Committee would receive a presentation on the Council's Value Creation Map and direction on linking future strategic direction with performance management;
- November/December – A further away-day would be held with Members in order to discuss the Council's objectives and priorities for 2008 onwards in the light of the results of the public consultation exercise and other evidence;
- January/February – High level objectives to be agreed and the rate set; and
- March – the Council's Strategic Plan for 2008 onwards to be agreed by the Council.

In order to facilitate Members' discussion of the Council's future, it had been agreed further that:

- all Chief Officers would attend the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meetings for the first part of the meeting dealing with the Corporate Plan; and
- attend the meetings of the Council Improvement Board.

The Committee agreed to approve the programme of meetings and events as outlined.

Corporate Strategic Issues

Civic Leadership

Review of Public Administration Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report which provided an update in respect of the Review of Public Administration:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 **As Members will recall, on the 6th July 2007, the Environment Minister, Arlene Foster, announced that there would be a review undertaken of the local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) led by a Sub-Committee of the NI Executive. The Review would reconsider the number of Councils, the vision for local government and the functions transferring to local authority control. The Review would reconsider also the proposed introduction of a Council-led community planning process and the complementary power of well-being.**
- 1.2 **It is intended that the RPA Review Sub-Committee will present its final report to the NI Executive in November, with a view to the Executive announcing its decisions in December, 2007.**

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 **Members will accept that we are rapidly approaching a critical milestone in defining the future shape and role of local government within Northern Ireland. The initiation of the Executive’s Review of the RPA recommendations relating to local government has lead to a high degree of uncertainty and suspicion within the sector. Key decisions will be taken over the coming months with regard to the vision for local government and the transfer of functions, assets and resources to Councils.**
- 2.2 **It is essential that local government is engaged within these discussions and takes every opportunity to inform and influence the ongoing deliberations and decisions of the NI Executive to ensure that the best interests of the citizen and the sector are protected and enhanced.**
- 2.3 **Local government must develop an agreed and cohesive voice and evidence-based agenda for local government reform and ensure that the views of local government are communicated directly to the decision makers and influential people conducting the RPA Review. The passion and pride that drives many involved in local government must not be lost in the debates that will take place in the months ahead.**

2.4 Local Government Modernisation

2.4.1 As Members will be aware, the Environment Minister, Arlene Foster had indicated also her intention to take forward the important work of modernising local government and has put in place an interim implementation structure of two Modernisation Sub-Groups which will be tasked with taking forward the two undernoted work strands.

1. Capacity Building, Policy and Legislation

Strengthening the way in which Councils work by modernising the policy and legislative framework within which Councils operate and by addressing the capacity of elected Members to deliver accountable citizen-centric local government services.

2. Service Improvement

Improving the way in which local Councils work in terms of delivering services in a way that is standardised, simple and provides value for money, thus enabling resources to be released by Councils to improve front-line delivery.

2.4.2 Each Sub-Group consists of 10 elected Members - two members from the five main political parties with the Chair and Deputy Chair of each Sub-Group taken from the RPA Strategic Leadership Board (a copy of the elected representatives on the Modernisation Sub-Groups is attached as Appendix 1). The DoE will provide secretariat support to each of the Sub-Groups, with technical support and advice provided by an officer group consisting of a Chief Executive and senior officer from local government and a civil servant officer.

2.4.3 On both strands, detailed work to address options, costs, benefits and timescales for delivery will be taken forward as a first step. It is envisaged that this work will take approximately 6 months to complete. It is important that local government is engaged in this process and ensures that the emerging modernisation programme is based on sound information and reflects the needs of the sector.

2.4.4 Accordingly, the Council must ensure that Belfast is adequately represented, at both an elected Member and officer level, on these Sub-Groups.

2.5 Development of a Vision for Local Government

2.5.1 As part of the RPA Review process the Department of Environment (DoE) have appointed PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to co-ordinate a process of consultation and stakeholder engagement to 'develop and articulate a shared vision for local government in Northern Ireland'.

2.5.2 Accordingly, PwC held a series of focus group meetings for local government representatives over the summer period which culminated in a stakeholder feedback event on 12th September in the Ramada Hotel, Belfast. At this event, PwC provided an update on the key themes and principles emerging from the stakeholder engagement process as outlined below.

Emerging Themes

- 1. Real opportunities but also challenges**
- 2. Aspirations for local government**
- 3. Community involvement and engagement**
- 4. Service delivery**
- 5. Modernisation**
- 6. Relationship between central and local government and other sectors**

Underpinning Principles

- **The interests of the citizen should be at the centre**
- **The focus should be on improving the quality of life and well-being of the community**
- **The vision should influence the functions and the numbers**
- **The vision should be closely linked to a vision for NI public service as a whole**
- **Greater efficiencies and effectiveness through partnership working**
- **Councils should be empowered to respond flexibility to local need**
- **A vision should be evolving rather than fixed**
- **A vision should be built on the existing strengths and successes of local government**

Members will note that a copy of the PwC presentation on their emerging findings is attached as Appendix 2.

- 2.5.5 Whilst the aforementioned principles had been generally accepted by those in attendance at the PwC event, there were some additions suggested including the need to make reference to the civic leadership role of Councils and the success of local government in delivering efficient, effective and responsive local public services. There was a recognition that if we are to create strong, vibrant, innovative and responsive local government who deliver the quality of local leadership and joined-up public services that their communities need, there must be a deepening of the community leadership role of Councils and an assertion of the primacy of local government as a key service provider within Northern Ireland.
- 2.5.6 A further PwC stakeholder event is scheduled for 16th October (10.30am till 3.30pm, Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown) to present the final findings on the development of a shared vision for local government and to update stakeholders on the wider RPA review.
- 2.6 Making the argument for the need for strong local government:
- Business Case for the transfer of functions from central to local government
- 2.6.1 As Members will be aware, Mr Colin Stutt has been commissioned by contributors from the entirety of local government including the Local Economic Development Forum and individual Councils, to develop an evidenced based business case for the transfer of functions from central to local government.
- 2.6.2 It is intended that the business case will provide a detailed analysis of the range of functions which should transfer and the rationale for their delivery at a local level. The report will outline arguments in favour of strong local government and will provide recommendations on the nature and level of resources which should transfer. The report will examine also the role of local government in creating sustainable communities and will identify the key components which Councils need to deliver this agenda.
- 2.6.3 It is anticipated that a detailed report on the findings of Mr. Stutt's work will be submitted to the Committee at its October meeting.

2.7 Manifesto and influencing strategy for local government

- 2.7.1** Members will appreciate the need for local government to develop a shared and coherent agenda for moving forward to ensure that the best interests of the sector and the citizen are taken into consideration within the deliberations of the NI Executive.
- 2.7.2** It is equally important that an effective communication and lobbying campaign is initiated on behalf of the sector to ensure that all strands of local government are mobilised and convey a consensual view on the need for strong, connected and responsive local government.
- 2.7.3** Accordingly, NILGA and SOLACE, supported by Stratagem, has developed and released on 12th September a joint 'Manifesto for Local Government' (a copy of which is attached as Appendix 3), which outlines the key arguments on behalf of the sector and which can be used as a lobbying tool to inform and influence the NI Executive's Review of the future shape and role of local government within Northern Ireland. The Manifesto has identified three key roles for local government:
- Giving Strong Civic Leadership
 - Delivering Modern Services
 - Shaping the places where people live and work
- 2.7.4** Furthermore, NILGA has appointed Stratagem, one of Northern Ireland's premier lobbying and public affairs companies, to provide professional support in developing and implementing an effective influencing strategy on behalf of local government.
- 2.7.5** Local government must also ensure that it takes an active role in engaging with and lobbying Party Groupings, Ministers, special advisors and civil servants with a view to influence the emerging recommendations and decisions of the NI Executive and its RPA Review Sub-Committee.
- 2.7.6** Accordingly, it is important that the Council uses both its influence and connections with Ministers and senior civil servant officials to advocate the need for strong, effective and responsive local government and to encourage them to understand and act upon the concerns of the sector.

3.0 Resource Implications

Financial and Human Resources

There are no financial or Human Resource implications contained within this report.

4.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- (a) note the contents of this update report and the appendices attached; and
- (b) encourage elected Members to assert their political influence to inform the deliberations of the NI Executive and its RPA Review Sub-Committee with a view to creating strong, effective and responsive local government within Northern Ireland.”

After a lengthy discussion, during which the Members recognised the need for the Elected Members of the Council to assert their political influence to inform the deliberations of the Northern Ireland Executive and its Review of Public Administration Review Sub-Committee in order to create a strong, effective and responsive Local Government within Northern Ireland and the need also to engage with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, the Committee agreed that a letter be forwarded to Arlene Foster, Minister with responsibility for the Department of the Environment, requesting that she meet with representatives of the Committee to discuss the Review of Public Administration

Northern Ireland Local Government Association Annual Subscription

The Committee was reminded that the Council's engagement and relationship with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the emerging proposals which were being put forward by the Association in order to strengthen its role within the Review of Public Administration and Local Government Modernisation processes had been under consideration for some time. The Committee, at its meeting on 15th June, had agreed:

- (a) that the payment of the Council's annual subscription to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association of £94,169 (12% increase on the previous year) be withheld, subject to an acceptable Service Level Agreement between both parties being agreed; and
- (b) to establish an All-Party Northern Ireland Local Government Association Working Group to progress this strand of work and to monitor and co-ordinate the Council's future relationship with the Association.

The Chief Executive reported that the Association was working currently on the development of a new performance framework and engagement strategy which it intended to use as the basis of a formal service level agreement with Belfast and the other Councils. The Association was holding internal strategic planning days on 12th and 13th October to expand on its current thinking and had invited a representative from the Council to attend. It was intended that the Association would submit further proposals to the Committee for consideration in due course. However, subsequent to the Committee's decision of 15th June, the Chief Executive had held discussions with some of the Party Group Leaders and the general consensus emerging was that the Council should consider the payment this year of an annual subscription to the value of £86,219, which was based on the previous year's fee plus the rate of inflation (3%) and not the £94,169 requested by the Association, which had been calculated on the basis of a redistribution of the penny rate product for each district.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to pay the Council's annual subscription to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to the value of £86,219 pro-rata for the period April till September, 2007, with the remaining payment only being made on the basis of the formulation of an acceptable Service Level Agreement and the achievement of targets established in conjunction with the Party Group Leaders.

Performance Improvement Agenda

Fixed Term Working Groups

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 15th June, it had agreed to establish twelve Fixed Term Working Groups/Steering Panels. In addition, during their meetings in June, the Health and Environmental Services, the Licensing and the Parks and Leisure Committees between them had agreed to establish a further six Working Groups. These decisions had been ratified by the Council at its meeting on 2nd July.

Subsequent to those decisions, the Development Committee, at its meeting on 8th August, had agreed in principle to the formation of five Working Groups. At the meetings of the Council held on 3rd July and 3rd September, several Members had expressed concern at the number of Working Groups which had been established and the fact that they appeared to be established on an ongoing basis rather than to undertake specific projects and requested that a report in the matter be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. In addition, the Council had agreed that the decision of the Development Committee in relation to the appointment of Fixed Term Working Groups be taken back for further consideration.

The Head of Committee and Members' Services reported that subsequently, at its meeting on 12th September, the Development Committee had deferred consideration of the matter until the report on Fixed Term Working Groups had been submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. He indicated that it was the intention to undertake a review of the establishment of Working Groups and it was anticipated that a detailed report in this regard would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

The Committee authorised the conducting of a review of the justification for the formation of Working Groups in light of the concerns expressed by Members and the impact which the establishment of such Groups was likely to have on the Council's revised decision-making arrangements.

**Strategic Policy and Resources
Committee Forward Work Plan**

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to a Forward Work Plan for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee:

“Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present a forward work plan for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Relevant Background Information

In pursuance of the Council Improvement Agenda the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is keen to establish a forward work plan for the Committee over the coming year in order to ensure the orderly conduct of business and Members are aware of the key outcomes for the Committee.

Key Issues

Appendix one provides a detailed work plan for October 2007 to March 2008 and a list of the key outcomes for the committee are detailed in appendix two. The work plan will be used as the basis for agreeing the monthly agenda with the Chair of the Committee.

The following is a summary of the key areas of work which the Committee will transact over the next six months.

Corporate Plan – this will require the Committee to set the overall strategic direction of the Council and to agree objectives and priorities. This will require the Committee to be at the centre of the corporate planning process between now and the end of March 2008. This work will culminate in agreement of the corporate plan and the corporate Value Creation Map. All Chief Officers will be present at Committee when corporate planning is being discussed.

Community Planning – when considering the Council’s strategic direction, the Committee will also need to consider extending planning beyond the Council to a city wide planning process. The Council has already agreed to start an embryonic community planning process and proposals on how this can be moved forward will be brought to Committee in the coming months. Also, through the strategic planning process Members will be deciding on which of the issues facing the city they wish to focus on through influence and in partnership with others. Members will require a framework to support them in this work and this will be presented to Committee in the form of an External Relations Strategy.

Finance – the Committee will agree a three year Medium Term Financial Plan, set the rate for 2008/09 and ensure the budget is allocated to meet the Council's objectives and priorities by agreeing the 2008/09 estimates. The Committee will also be required to prioritise the Capital Programme and ensure it is aligned to the delivery of the Council's objectives and priorities.

City Investment Fund – a report will be presented to Committee on the development of a City Investment Fund. During the year the Committee will need to agree on the purpose, principles and objectives of the fund along with financial limits and financing arrangements. A process for the identification and prioritisation of projects will need to be agreed.

Efficiency Programme – the Committee will be presented with the outcome of the efficiency programme for 2008/09 which will require agreement on areas such as advertising, overtime and training. The efficiency targets for 2009/10 – 2011/12 will also need to be set.

Performance Review – one of the key tasks of the Committee is review the Council's performance on delivering its objectives and priorities. The Committee will be required to agree a suite of key performance questions, indicators and targets to support the corporate plan and review these on a quarterly basis. Bernard Marr will provide support to the Committee in this regard.

Structure – one of the key issues for the Committee to address is the alignment of the Council's current structure to the delivery of the agreed strategic direction, objectives and priorities.

Governance – during the year the Committee will be requested to agree the corporate risk register and a corporate governance framework. An assurance report will be presented on the operation of the revised scheme of delegation.

Human Resources – the Committee will be required to agree the following:

- Replacement of the Head of Human Resources
- Member Development Programme
- Human Resources Strategy
- Workforce Development Plan
- Individual performance appraisal mechanism for Chief Officers and Heads of Service

- Capability and Attendance Policies
- Absence targets
- Single Status reports on working arrangements, basic grade review and local agreements.

Asset Management – the Committee will be provided with options on how the Council’s assets can be better used to support the delivery of agreed objectives and priorities. Two of the main issues which the Committee will have to address are the refurbishment and future use of the City Hall and future accommodation needs. The Committee will also need to consider the disposal of a number of Council sites on which decisions have already been taken.

ISB – the Committee will be requested to agree an Information Strategy which will outline how the information needs in relation to the delivery of the Council’s objectives and priorities can be met.

RPA – the Chief Executive will provide monthly update reports to Committee and the Committee will have to determine how the Council can influence the process and outcomes.

Good Relations – the following areas will require consideration by the Committee:

- Good Relations Plan
- Peace III Plan
- Disability Action Plan

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to agree:

1. The forward work plan for October 2007 – March 2008 outlined in appendix one.
2. The key outcomes for the Committee as outlined in appendix two.
3. The attendance of B Marr at Committee in October to discuss the VCM process and in November to discuss the role of the Committee in relation to performance review.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Communication Review – Quarterly Report

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing details of the progress which had been made in the area of communications during the period from April till September, 2007.

Good Relations and Equality Issues

(Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

Minutes of Meeting of Good Relations Steering Panel

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Steering Panel of 7th September and adopted the recommendations of the Steering Panel in relation to the following issues:

Good Relations Grant-Aid

Organisation	Recommendation £
St. Colmcilles/Gilnahirk Inter-Church Group	2,500
Peace Players International	10,000
Northern Ireland Tolerance Educational Cultural Association (NI-TECA)	1,800
Arts for All	3,100
Shankill Women's Group	5,000
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	1,700
North Belfast Women's Initiative and Support Project	4,515
Training for Women's Network	7,500
Provisional total this month	36,115

**Delegated Authority to the Chief Executive
for the Approval of Good Relations Grants**

The Steering Panel had agreed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to adopt a policy on the award of grant-aid whereby:

- (i) all grant applications received be reported to the Good Relations Steering Panel for consideration;
- (ii) those grant applications which received the unanimous support of the Steering Panel be awarded under the Delegated Authority of the Chief Executive;

- (iii) where the Steering Panel could not achieve a consensus on an application it will be deferred initially for a period of one month to allow further information to be provided and only applications whereby agreement of the Steering Panel could not be achieved, would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for decision;
- (iv) in the unlikely event of an application being submitted where there was insufficient time for it to be considered by the Steering Panel, authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Panel to award grants not to exceed £3,000; and
- (v) all applications be reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in due course for notation only.

Peace III Draft Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Panel had approved the draft Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan, which would now be subject to a two-month public consultation period. The final version of the Plan would be submitted to the Committee in January for approval before being forwarded to the Special European Union Programmes Body in February, 2008.

Submission to the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords on the Economic Impact of Immigration

The Steering Panel had been advised that the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords was seeking submissions on the economic impact of immigration. The Institute for Conflict Research, based on Duncairn Gardens, had been requested directly to provide evidence to this inquiry. Given the recent research which had been commissioned by the Steering Panel into migration and Belfast, this request had been forwarded to the Good Relations Unit.

Accordingly, a response to the inquiry had been submitted to and approved by the Good Relations Steering Panel, which had recommended it for approval to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Policy on the Erection of Dual-Language Signage

The Committee was reminded that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 9th August, had considered a request that the Council provide dual-language signs at the City Cemetery and Falls Park. The Council, at its meeting on 3rd September, had agreed that the minute be amended to provide that a Council policy in relation to the erection of dual-language signage be submitted within a three-month period.

The Director of Legal Services requested that the Members consider whether it would be more appropriate for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, rather than the Parks and Leisure Committee, to be the forum which considered this issue and made recommendations to the Council regarding the content of the policy for two reasons: firstly, the decision of the Council referred to a Council-wide policy and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had a general responsibility under Standing Orders to address those issues which involved more than one Committee; and secondly, the development of the policy would need to take into account issues such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and compliance with the Council's Equality Scheme. The time limit set by the Council for the development of the policy was three months and to achieve this deadline it would require staff who were familiar with the broad policy context to undertake such work. Accordingly, it had been suggested that the Good Relations Unit, which reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee through the Good Relations Steering Panel for issues relating to equality, diversity and good relations, should undertake this work. This would be under the direction of the Director of Legal Services as the Chief Officer responsible for Good Relations and Equality.

The Committee agreed to the development of the policy on the erection of dual-language signs as outlined.

Policy Issues

Northern Ireland Assembly Liaison

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update in respect of the work which was been undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Human Resources Issues

Capability and Attendance Policies

The Committee considered the undernoted report in respect of the proposed Capability and Attendance Policies:

“Relevant Background Information

Consistent and good people management is central to the Council's ability to recruit, develop, organise, manage and retain a capable workforce. Robust HR policies and approaches which resolve HR issues and meet business needs underpin good people management; seek to ensure that staff are managed effectively, fairly and consistently; and help to give managers a clear understanding of their responsibilities. To this end the Council has developed policies on dealing with employee capability matters and managing attendance.

Both of these policies were previously agreed with the Council's Personnel Sub-Committee for consultation with the Council's trade unions.

Key Issues

Capability Policy

The Capability Policy is attached as appendix 1.

- The policy seeks to improve working practices and arrangements by encouraging and assisting employees to improve their performance, where such difficulties exist.
- It provides a fair and consistent means of dealing with employee capability problems.
- It deals with cases where an employee is lacking in some area of knowledge, skill or aptitude and is consequently unable to carry out the required duties of his/her job to an acceptable standard.
- It is to be used where there is a lack of ability rather than a deliberate failure to perform to the standards of work of which he/she is capable.
- Nothing in the procedure is intended to prevent the normal process of supervisory control where managers allocate work, monitor performance, draw attention to errors and poor quality and as importantly highlight work well done. Line managers will attempt to resolve issues of employee under performance on an informal basis before invoking formal procedures.
- The formal procedures set out in this policy are in three stages which allow for detailed discussion on the improvements required; how improvement in performance can be achieved; any associated targets, action plans and training; and the time-scale for improvements to be met.

After extensive and effective consultation with the Council's trade unions this policy has now been agreed by TU side.

Attendance Policy

The Council's draft Attendance Policy was developed to support a culture in Belfast City Council in which everyone works to maximise attendance. It was designed to balance the interests of individual employees with the requirements of the service and encourage all employees to meet the high standards of attendance normally achieved by the vast majority of Belfast City Council staff.

The draft policy includes an Attendance Procedure consisting of a series of stages at which employees who do not meet the minimum standards of attendance are encouraged to improve their attendance to an acceptable standard.

In addition to consultation on the Capability Policy Members will be aware that there has been a considerable consultation and negotiation agenda over the past few months on the Single Status Agreement. Consequently it has not been possible to finalise agreement on the draft Attendance Policy within the desired timescale. However meaningful consultation with the Council's trade unions is continuing and common ground has been reached on a number of areas, in particular the need to have a consistent set of triggers for any action taken through the staged process and the need for the policy to be supported by a set of guidelines which provide detailed and clear steps for all staff on the policy's implementation.

Proposed next steps

In relation to the Capability policy it is proposed that this policy is implemented across the Council supported by appropriate training, communication and evaluation.

With regards to the Attendance Policy it is proposed that consultation continues with the trade unions with a view to seeking agreement while continuing with the overall approach to absence management which includes a robust performance management approach and enhanced training and communication. (Specific actions being taken on absence management were presented to the P and R Committee in August). A further report will be made to the Strategic P and R Committee on the outcome of continued consultation.

Resource Implication

Resources will be required from the HR and Internal Communications sections for effective implementation. This will be planned in relation to other priority areas and within existing resources.

Decision Required

Members are asked to agree the Capability policy for implementation and agree that consultation on the Attendance Policy continues with a view to seeking agreement. A further report will be made to the Strategic P and R Committee on the Attendance Policy consultations”

The Committee approved the implementation of the Capability Policy, a copy of which was available on the Members' Portal, and agreed that consultation on the Attendance Policy continue with a view to seeking agreement with the Trades Unions.

Standing Order 55 – Employment of Relatives

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Order 55 and the authority delegated to him, the Director of Corporate Services had authorised the appointment of a number of staff who were related to existing officers of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointments.

Accommodation and Hospitality

**City Hall – Use of Accommodation
and Provision of Civic Hospitality**

The Committee was advised that the undernoted requests for the use of accommodation in the City Hall and the provision of civic hospitality had been received. An indication as to whether they fell within the criteria approved by the Committee and the recommendation thereon of the Head of Committee and Members' Services is set out hereunder:

Organisation / Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/ Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Britannia Movers International	Annual Conference Dinner 23rd May, 2008 (evening) Approximately 190 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	It is estimated that 190 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast	Provision of a pre-dinner drinks reception Approximate cost £600 Approximate budget remaining £154,317
Vital Voices Global Partnership (Washington, USA)	Trans-Regional Exchange: Women Leaders Building Peace and Prosperity 26th October, 2007 (lunch) Approximately 70 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a Luncheon	This international programme seeks to highlight the role of women working in partnership to develop strategies for conflict management and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and South Africa. This Vital Voices programme builds on successful events hosted in Belfast in previous years and encourages participants to learn from the experience of women. This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Providing Civic Leadership.	Provision of a Luncheon Approximate cost £1,100 Approximate budget remaining £153,217

Organisation / Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/ Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
The Law Society of Northern Ireland	Annual Conference / President's Dinner 26th October, 2007 evening Approximately 200	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	It is estimated that 125 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast	Provision of a pre-dinner drinks reception Approximate cost £600 Approximate budget remaining £152,617

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Adherence to Equal Opportunities Principles by external Organisations

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing details in respect of an event which had been held in the City Hall on 11th July and agreed that a review of the current procedures covering the conditions of hire of the City Hall by external organisations be conducted in order to ensure that all such events did not come into conflict with the Council's requirement to maintain at all times a neutral and harmonious working environment.

Facilities Management

Standing Order 60 – Acquisition or Disposal of Property

In accordance with Standing Order 60 the Committee was notified with regard to the disposal of the following properties:

Parks and Leisure Committee 12th June, 2007

Lands at Ladybrook Park

Agreement to dispose of the remaining plots of surplus land to the rear of Ladybrook Park to the residents at a nominal value on a 999 year lease.

Land at Lamberg Street Playground

Agreement to dispose of approximately 20 square metres of land at Lamberg Street Playground to a developer for the sum of £10,000 plus the Council's reasonable legal fees and expenses.

Land at St. Michael's Park

Agreement to lease to the Shankill's Women Centre an area of land (approximately 0.118 acres) at St. Michael's Park for a term of twenty-five years for the purpose of providing an outdoor play facility.

Cliftonville Playing Fields

Agreement to surrender back to the Belfast Education and Library the lease of a small area of land at Cliftonville Playing Fields.

Parks and Leisure Committee 9th August, 2007
Land at Ballysillan Playing Fields

Approval to dispose of approximately 0.18 acres of land on a twenty-five year lease at rent of £1,100 per annum (reviewable every five years) to Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre.

Parks and Leisure Committee 13th September, 2007
Wayleaves at Ormeau Park

Approval to Hearth Housing Association for Wayleaves at Ormeau Park for service and utilities connections.

The Committee noted the foregoing disposals of property.

Disposal of Former Travellers' Lands
at Glen Road and Colin Glen Park

The Committee considered the undernoted report in respect of the disposal of former Travellers' lands at Glen Road and Colin Glen Park:

"Relevant Background Information"

The Development Committee, at its meeting on 20th April 2005, agreed to dispose of Council owned land (some of which had been previously used or acquired for traveller accommodation) at Colin Glen Park, Glen Road and Hannahstown to the NIHE for the purposes of social housing, subject to a valuation to be agreed between the VLA/DSD/NIHE/BCC. It also recommended that the Council fund the acquisition of land in the Greater Belfast Area for transit site purposes to a maximum of the value of the average price per acre of the aforementioned sites.

In the report to the Development Committee on 20th April 2005 Members were asked to note that although the NIHE proposals suggest they will acquire the sites their current methodology for site acquisition involved appointing Housing Associations to undertake site acquisition and development.

Key Issues:

Discussions have subsequently taken place between NIHE, BCC and the relevant Housing Associations regarding the disposal of lands, and the following is an update on the various sites:

Land at Colin Glen Park:

NIHE have nominated Clanmil Housing Association to acquire and develop this site for social housing. A proposed scheme layout is currently being prepared by Clanmil, although the layout and density may be influenced, in part, by the results of topographical, ground condition and site contamination surveys. The value of the site will be influenced by the potential housing density and layout.

Following the results of such surveys and preparation of a proposed scheme layout the purchase price can be agreed. It is recommended that negotiations regarding the terms of the disposal take place between BCC (Estates Unit) and Clanmil (or their appointed agent) but subject to the Valuation and Lands Agency approving the valuation. A further report will be taken to Committee for approval regarding the terms of the disposal, including the sale price. At this stage the Committee are asked to approve, in principle, the proposed transfer of the land from BCC to Clanmil Housing Association, subject to agreement on the terms of the disposal (including the sale price and other terms relating to the agreed housing scheme to be delivered etc).

Land at Glen Road (adjacent St Teresa's GAC):

NIHE have nominated Oaklee Housing Association to develop this site for social housing purposes and discussions are currently underway with Oaklee and NIHE regarding the terms of the potential disposal. In addition, discussions are also underway with St Teresa's GAC (whose land adjoins the subject site) regarding the potential transfer of a small portion of undeveloped land within their ownership to potentially form part of Oaklee's proposed housing scheme. St Teresa's GAC occupy the adjoining land by virtue of a 99 year lease with BCC, and any potential surrender by St Teresa's of a portion of these lands would be subject to agreement on the terms of such surrender.

A small portion of this site is also used as a location for the Council's Travellers Liaison site office and a portacabin leased to An Munia Tober as a playgroup facility, and this will be reflected in the housing proposals for the site.

Oaklee Housing Association's proposed scheme currently comprises a social housing scheme comprising a mix of general needs social housing and supported housing for people with learning disabilities, although the supported housing element may be subject to change.

It is recommended that negotiations regarding the terms of the disposal take place between BCC (Estates Unit) and Oaklee Housing Association (or their appointed agent), but subject to the Valuation and Lands Agency approving the valuation. A further report will be taken to Committee for approval regarding the terms of the disposal, including the sale price, the detail of the proposed scheme and also in relation to any potential surrender of a portion of the adjoining leased lands at St Teresa's GAC. At this stage the Committee are asked to approve, in principle, the proposed transfer of the land from BCC to Oaklee Housing Association, subject to agreement on the terms of the disposal (including the sale price and other terms relating to the agreed housing scheme to be delivered etc).

Land at Glen Road (adj. Glen Road Heights)

The Council's land at this location adjoins land owned by the NIHE and privately owned lands, and proposals have been drawn up to develop all these lands together as a mixed social and private housing scheme. A further report will be taken to Committee on the detail of this scheme.

Resource Implications

Financial

The sale of these lands will result in a significant capital return to the Council, the details of which will be brought back to Committee for approval. It is recommended that the Valuation and Lands Agency approve the sale price of the land

Asset and Other Implications

Disposal of these lands will realise a capital receipt, and the subsequent development of the lands for social housing accords with an effective use of these assets.

Recommendations

Committee are asked to approve, in principle, the proposed disposal of the land at Colin Glen Park from BCC to Clanmil Housing Association and the proposed disposal of the land at Glen Road (site directly adjacent St Teresa's GAC) from BCC to Oaklee Housing Association, subject to:

- (i) agreement on the terms of the disposal (including the sale price and other terms)
- (ii) the Valuation and Lands Agency approving the sale price
- (iii) a further report being brought to Committee for approval of the terms of the disposal."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Chairman