

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Tuesday, 26th February, 2008

Meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Members present: Councillor Dodds (Chair); and
Councillors Browne, Convery, Crozier, Kirkpatrick and
Lavery

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Improvement;
Mr. T. Salmon, Director of Corporate Services;
Mr. S. McCrory, Principal Committee Administrator; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors W. Browne, A. Maskey, McCann and Rodway.

Finance

Request for Funding - Belfast Common Purpose

The Committee was reminded that in previous years it had funded two bursaries for voluntary/community sector participants in the Belfast Common Purpose programme. The Director of Corporate Services stated that a request to provide funding for two full and one part bursary, in the sum of £8,450, for the 2008 Programme had been received. However, the previous year some Members had expressed concern in relation to the increased cost of providing assistance to Common Purpose and, whilst agreeing to fund bursaries for 2007 in the sum of £8,400, the Committee had requested that an assessment of the benefits accruing to the Council for assisting the organisation be completed before any future support was considered.

The Director of Corporate Services reported that an assessment of the Common Purpose programme, which had been based on a survey of Members and Council staff who had participated, had been completed. Discussion had also taken place with staff of Common Purpose who had provided the results of their own survey of graduates which had been conducted in 2007. The results of both exercises had provided a positive endorsement of the programme.

The Director explained that, given the anticipated leadership/co-ordination role expected to be undertaken by Local Authorities post-Review of Public Administration, it would seem to be desirable that the Council remained supportive of a programme which sought to connect the City's decision makers. However, against this, the Committee would be aware of the pressures on Council resources and the need to demonstrate

efficiency. The Council had already committed, separately, to fund Members/staff on the Common Purpose 2008 programmes at a cost of £12,675. The Director advised the Committee that, in light of this, it might wish to consider the following options:

- (i) accede to the request for funding of £8,450, which would fund two full and one part bursary on the programme;
- (ii) agree to continue to fund two bursaries at a cost to the Council of £7,000; or
- (iii) agree to reduce the funding level to one bursary only at a cost of £3,500.

After discussion, the Committee agreed not to accede to the request for funding for bursaries on the Common Purpose programme 2008 and agreed further that a review of the participation of Elected Members and Council staff on the Common Purpose programme be undertaken, with a report thereon being submitted to a future meeting.

Brighter Belfast Initiative - Proposed Projects 2008/2009

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 4th February, had approved the Revenue Estimates 2008/2009. This had included an amount of £1.5 million in the Waste Disposal Fund, which was to be allocated next year to finance the Brighter Belfast Initiative, Disability Access and the closure of Dargan Road. The Director of Corporate Services explained that the Health and Environmental Services Committee, at its meeting on 9th January, had agreed the projects which were to be included in the Brighter Belfast Initiative for 2008/2009 and had recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the undernoted levels of funding within the Waste Disposal Fund:

<u>Project</u>	<u>£</u>
Making Belfast Bloom	50,000
The Community in the City: A Public Art Project	50,000
Evening Economy	90,000
Greencare III	150,000
Pride of Place Competition	7,000
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Total	347,000

The Committee approved the funding for the Brighter Belfast Initiative 2008/2009.

Human Resources

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 member of staff who was related to an existing officer of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointment.

Attendance Policy

(Mrs. J. Minne, Acting Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend the new Attendance Policy for adoption by members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee based on the outcome of consultations with the trade unions on the draft policy; and to advise Committee on the next steps with regard to its implementation.

Relevant Background Information

A draft Attendance Policy was developed following the engagement of legal consultants to review the council’s existing policy for managing absence. We were advised by the legal consultants that the current policy is essentially no longer fit for purpose; it is too informal; and leaves too much to the discretion of managers, which is inconsistent with the policy having contractual effect. In March 2007 Personnel Sub-Committee agreed a new draft Attendance Policy for consultation with the council’s trade unions. In September 2007 the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that consultation with the trade unions should be extended with a view to seeking agreement on the policy as trade union side had not been in a position to give the matter due consideration because of the substantial Single Status agenda at that time.

Consultations since then have been intense, detailed, ongoing and at times considerably challenging.

Management side recognises that introducing a policy of this significance without trade union agreement may lead to increased employee relations problems. However, particularly in the light of the public concern arising from the recently published NI Audit Office report on absenteeism in NI councils, further delay in moving forward on this issue cannot be justified.

On 4th February 2008 therefore chief officers agreed that the consistent, robust implementation of a new BCC Attendance Policy was a key step to the council reducing absence to the kind of level which members, senior management and the public expect. Accordingly they directed the matter to be concluded and subsequently agreed the text of the new policy to be recommended to members to reflect the result of these consultations with the trade unions.

Key Issues

The proposed new Attendance Policy is attached at Appendix 1. In summary the main amendments are:

1. The policy has changed from 3 to 4 formal stages preceded by an informal meeting between staff and management where absence exceeds 5 days.^{1[1]}
2. The definition of long term absence has been amended to make it clearer as follows: *'Any period of absence longer than four weeks would normally be regarded as 'long term' if the employee has an underlying condition which is likely to result in continuing or further absence'*.
3. In an effort to achieve an agreed policy, management side compromised on the triggers for action under the standards of attendance and moved to 6 occasions or 12 days at Stage One and 3 occasions or 12 days at Stages Two to Four (totalling 15 occasions or 48 days). This compromise was put to the trade unions on the basis that they will agree to these triggers, otherwise the previous position of 12 occasions/44 days position stands.
4. The following paragraph regarding monitoring and review has been added: *'The Employee Relations Unit of Human Resources will review the policy on an annual basis, in consultation with the trade unions. The implementation of the policy will be monitored at corporate, departmental, service, unit and individual level as outlined in the Framework for Reporting, Monitoring and Managing Absence'*.

^{1[1]} Where periods or days are referred to, the policy contextualises these as being "within a rolling 12 month period", though management may, where appropriate, review attendance over a longer service period.

5. The first draft by management side in relation to the Stage 3 meeting was *'If the required level of attendance is achieved during the review period following the Stage Three meeting, the employee will be put back to Stage Two (i.e. the Stage Three warning will no longer apply and the employee will have another opportunity to meet the standards of attendance specified in the Second Stage warning previously issued to him or her.'* The trade unions wanted to amend this by replacing the provision in italic with: 'there will be no further action under the formal stages of this procedure.' Management side believes that an employee who has reached Stage 3 (potentially 10 occasions/33 days absence) cannot be allowed to drop back completely from the formal stages and thus a compromise position of the employee reverting to stage one in the above circumstances has been agreed.

The trade union side has not finally agreed the Attendance Policy in full, however it has stated :

'Whilst the Trade Union Group does not agree in totality with the Final Management Draft Attendance Policy we believe it is the best that can be achieved through negotiation'. Each sovereign Trade Union is committed to convening emergency Branch meetings in order to validate the above statement and also to get a mandate to enter into a time bound process of consulting their members in a proactive and positive manner, informing them of all alternatives.'

The trade unions indicated that branch committees have accepted the Attendance Policy as the best that can be achieved through negotiation. They have stated they need time to consult with their members to ensure they are absolutely clear about the policy and its implications. The trade union side has indicated that it feels there will be a positive outcome to this consultation and has committed to completion of this consultation process by 31st March 2008.

It is proposed that the Committee adopts the new Attendance Policy for the council for implementation. Should the outcome of the consultation by the trade unions result in a failure to agree the approved policy the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be advised of this at its April meeting with a recommendation regarding implementation.

Next steps

The trade unions have also undertaken to engage with Corporate HR and Management Side JCC to seek agreement on detailed guidance for the application of the policy, while the consultation with their members on the policy is ongoing. A draft of this 'Attendance Booklet' has been developed and forwarded to TU Side. If agreement on the policy is not achieved, agreement on the guidance is obviously going to be difficult. Members are asked to agree that consultation on the guidance booklet is time bound to three months from the approval of policy by Council.

Following approval by the council and trade unions' members, Corporate HR will work with departments to help to implement new policy arrangements and address issues such as transitioning current employees with poor attendance records into the appropriate stage of the new policy.

Training for managers on the new policy will only be possible when the guidance is in place, but in most departments this training will only be on the new aspects of the policy as extensive training on the general principles of managing absences has already taken place.

It is estimated therefore that full introduction of the policy will take approximately 6 months from Council approval, provided central and departmental resources are available.

Resource Implications

Resource commitment from Corporate HR and departments will be intensive during the pre-implementation period. For Corporate HR (Employee Relations) and business support staff in the departments the 'bedding-in' period will be particularly resource intensive, as operational line management will need additional support to gain confidence in the application of the new policy and to ensure consistency of approach. Members however, are well aware that the consistent, robust implementation of a new BCC Attendance policy is key to the council reducing absence and its associated costs. Increasing management resources have been applied to this issue within HR and departments and it is now recognised that without the new standards, little more can be done to reduce sickness to the kind of level which Members; senior management and the public expect. Although the new policy will not simply by its existence solve the issues, it will provide for each employee and manager a single consistent foundation for management actions and provide a means to hold officers accountable.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Approve the Attendance Policy for implementation subject to trade unions' members' agreement as outlined above**
- **Note the next steps and significant resource commitments required."**

In response to a number of questions, the Acting Head of Human Resources informed the Committee that the trigger points for action in relation to the standards of attendance in the new policy were based both on the length of time of any absences and on the number of occasions of absences. The maximum amount of absence an employee could have throughout the four formal stages was 15 occasions or a total of 48 days, after which they could be dismissed as the final stage of the Policy. She pointed out that the Attendance Policy had been benchmarked with other organisations which managed sickness absence efficiently. In addition, guidelines in relation to the application of the policy had been developed for all members of staff to seek to ensure that it would be applied consistently throughout the Council. She advised the Committee that Corporate Human Resources would be monitoring closely its implementation.

The Committee approved the Attendance Policy, a copy of which was available on the Modern.gov site, for implementation, subject to the agreement of the members of the Trades Unions as outlined in the report and subject also to an inclusion of an explanatory paragraph in the Policy clarifying that the total number of days absence and the number of occasions an employee could be absent were cumulative.

Pre-employment Training Programmes for the Long-Term Unemployed

(Mrs. J. Minne, Acting Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed:

"Purpose of report:

To seek approval to widen the scope of the council's community outreach programme by engaging with the Citywide Employability Consortium (CEC) to:

1. develop pre-employment training programmes for the ^{2[1]}long term unemployed which would lead to successful trainees being guaranteed job interviews for relevant publicly advertised council posts; and
2. participate in a Workforce Buddies Project, which is an employee mentoring scheme, to support the retention of former long term unemployed appointees.

Relevant background information:

The CEC is part funded and managed by Belfast City Council's Economic Development Section and is made up of representatives from the 4 areas of the city – LEAP (North), Stepping Stones (East), Gems NI (South), Employment Services Board and Employers Forum (West & Greater Shankill).

The CEC has developed an operational plan for a city-wide employer interface service and has asked BCC to assist the long term unemployed in these areas to gain the necessary skills and experience to support them in gaining employment.

Key Issues

- (1) Developing pre-employment training programmes for the long term unemployed:

BCC has facilitated some short term work experience placements for the long term unemployed through its current community outreach programme and the CEC has requested further council engagement in providing pre-employment training programmes that are specifically designed to link the unemployed and economically inactive to specific job vacancies within the council and the wider public sector.

Such training programmes, which can be delivered on-site or off-site, will be designed by the council, other participating public sector organisations, the CEC and a recognised training organisation e.g. Belfast Metropolitan College. This training will reflect the skills, qualities and values required for basic entry level posts within the public sector e.g. a cleansing operative, and modules may include an awareness of health and safety, an introduction to IT, customer service skills, communication skills, team skills, learning to work as a team, dealing with conflict, decision making techniques, interview techniques and mock interview sessions.

^{2[1]} Long-term unemployed is defined as those being without work for over 1 year (International Labour Organisation)

The programme duration can range from three to 7 weeks and the maximum number of participants per programme is 15. As part of the programme, the council would be required to provide work experience placements, site visits to BCC locations for those involved and guarantee a job interview for relevant publicly advertised council posts to those who have successfully completed the course.

Other large public sector organisations such as the N.I. Housing Executive are also considering participation in this initiative and, as such, would be a partner organisation for the council in this regard. The Mater Hospital, the North & West Belfast Trust and the Royal Group of Hospitals have already successfully completed eight pre-employment training programmes and therefore provide useful case studies.

In terms of the legal implications of guaranteeing interviews to the long term unemployed, the Equality Commission for N.I. has advised that employers are permitted to treat long-term unemployed persons more favourably than other persons providing this condition or requirement is applied to all unemployed persons. The CEC will have responsibility for ensuring fair selection of the trainees on a city-wide and equality basis and for liaising with other organisations in terms of similar employability programmes. Regardless of such a guaranteed interview scheme, all council appointments would of course continue to be based on the merit principle in line with the Local Government Staff Commission's Code of Procedure on Recruitment and Selection.

(2) Workforce Buddies Programme:

The council has also been asked to consider engaging in the Workforce Buddies Project to support the retention of a former long-term unemployed appointee and to help him/her settle effectively into his/her new role. This project is an employee mentoring scheme where council workers who by attending formal training (with the option of gaining an OCR Certificate in Coaching which could also go towards an NVQ qualification) can act as a 'buddy' for the new start by providing coaching, mentoring and support for up to 6 months. The 'buddies' would be required to undertake the role voluntarily without additional remuneration but the role is a personal development opportunity. This approach has been evaluated as very successful in both the Mater Hospital and the Royal Group of Hospitals.

Resource Implications

Financial

(1) Pre-employment training programme for the long-term unemployed:

The CEC has advised that the cost of running a 3 year training programme, with 120 participants, is £406,444 across all the engaging organisations (a cost of £3,387 per participant). However, the North Belfast Partnership Board (NBPB) which works in partnership with the CEC and who will have project management responsibility has recently secured European funding to administer such pre-employment programmes across the city for public sector employers. This leaves a match funding requirement of £142,256. Of this amount, it is anticipated that £55,500 will be obtained through a Government Training Programme leaving an outstanding amount of £86,756 to be sourced. Whilst other funding sources are being investigated by the NBPB e.g. BRO, the council has been asked to make a contribution to this amount. This contribution is not essential to participation in the scheme but it does present an opportunity for the council to enhance its corporate social responsibilities and take a leading role in this initiative. Given that the sum of £86,756 is for a three year period (equating to £28, 918 per annum), should Members agree to engage with this initiative it is proposed that the council contribute a third of the costs i.e. £10,000 per annum from the Human Resource corporate workforce development budget. This equates to the council contributing £250 per participant per annum (based on 40 participants) which is in line with the national average currently being spent per employee per annum on training and development within the public sector. The NBPB would prefer this funding as a lump sum for the three years. It is recommended however that funding should be given by BCC for year one only (i.e. £10,000 contribution for 2008/09) with funding for years two and three being dependant on successful evaluation of the first year of the programme and agreement from committee in this regard.

(2) Workforce Buddies Project:

The cost of mentor training per council employee would be £500 with formal accreditation costing an additional £200. Time off for training would also need to be factored into operational considerations.

Human Resources

Given the scope and scale of this long-term project, initial communication and consultation has taken place with COMT, relevant council sections, the management side of the JCC and the trade unions. If engagement in the programme is agreed, this will continue in order to ensure its effective planning, project management and communication. Specifically, detailed discussions regarding resource implications will take place with the individual council sections most affected.

The CEC is not in a position to sign the council's indemnity form or provide any indemnity cover and the council would be required to self-insure these long-term unemployed trainees whilst on a work experience placement or site visit to the council. This situation is acceptable to Legal Services and the council's Insurance Officer provided that the relevant health and safety processes are put in place.

Finally, in accordance with Section 75 duties of the N.I. Act 1998, a consultation and screening process will ensue to assess if there is any adverse impact in relation to one or more of the Section 75 categories.

Asset and Other Implications

There are no assets or other implications contained within this report.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree to widen the scope of the council's community outreach programme by engaging with the Citywide Employability Consortium (CEC) to:

- (1) develop pre-employment training programmes for the^{3[2]} long term unemployed which would lead to successful trainees being guaranteed job interviews for relevant publicly advertised council posts; and
- (2) to participate in a Workforce Buddies Project, which is an employee mentoring scheme, to support the retention of former long term unemployed appointees.

Members are also asked to agree that the council funds these initiatives as detailed above.

^{3[2]} Long-term unemployed is defined as those being without work for over 1 year (International Labour Organisation)

Key to Abbreviations

- CEC - Citywide Employability Consortium
- NBPB - North Belfast Partnership Board
- BRO - Belfast Regeneration Office
- JCC - Joint Consultative Committee

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation in relation to the widening of the scope of the Council's community outreach programme through the engagement with the Citywide Employability Consortium as outlined, agreed to defer consideration of the question of the funding of the project to enable a further report to be submitted to the Committee in due course and agreed also that a report in relation to the Council's outreach schemes be submitted to a future meeting.

Asset Management

City Hall Major Works - Project Update

The Director of Improvement submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report providing an update in relation to the City Hall major works project:

"Relevant Background Information"

A previous update was presented to the Committee on 16 November 2007, when it was agreed that subsequent update reports be presented on a quarterly basis, with additional exception reports as necessary.

The decant to Adelaide Exchange has been completed and the City Hall was cleared to enable the contractor to commence work on 19 November with a 90 week overall contract period, to be undertaken in two phases.

The formal challenge received from one of the contractors who were unsuccessful in their tender for the specialist Records Removal/Off-Site Storage contract proceeded to court and judgement was recently made in favour of the Council and the contractor who issued the challenge has stated that he will not appeal. Consequently, the contract will be awarded and implemented shortly.

Key Issues

Programme

An outline programme is attached for information.

Progress to date (week commencing 11 February) is as follows:

- Protection of marble areas in progress;
- Asbestos removal from the main roof is complete;
- Re-roofing of the West and South roofs has commenced and is 10% complete;
- All non-notifiable asbestos in the remainder of the building has been removed. An application has been made to the Health and Safety Executive for approval to remove notifiable asbestos. Encapsulation work has also commenced in the roof area of the Rotunda;
- Basement shelving has been removed;
- Removal of chandeliers & pendants for refurbishment is complete;
- Survey work of existing services installations is complete;
- Stripping out of radiators, pipework and electrical cable has commenced;
- Sprinkler system has been drained down and is being removed.

Progress is currently adhering generally to the programme.

Variations

The incorporation of a memorial to BCC employees to be situated in the courtyard at a cost of £22,800 was approved at SP&R December 2007;

Other potential variations being considered for incorporation into the project are:

- Emergency Room relocation – estimated cost £450,000;
- Control Room relocation to 2nd floor – cost will be dependent on brief which is currently being developed;
- PABX room upgrade –cost will be dependent on brief which is currently being developed;

The variations regarding the Emergency Room, Control Room and PABX Room are dependant upon proposals being finalised, together with costs, by Health & Environmental Services and Corporate Services respectively and presented to Committee for further consideration.

Depending on the nature of the works there could be a substantial impact on the overall cost and programme which will be alleviated by reaching early decisions on these matters. Final proposals on these variations really need to be signed off or rejected by committee by March 2008.

City Hall: Future Use

The future use of City Hall is a much more fundamental question which directly involves Members. To minimise any potential additional costs, variations and/or delay, Members are asked to engage with this further via the Cross Party accommodation groups as soon as possible.

In broad terms the issue may be stated as follows; *'What balance do members wish to strike between the various competing potential uses of the City Hall building?'* The main uses are:

1. as a political base, which would involve some/all of the following:-
 - (a) hosting monthly Council and Committee meetings;
 - (b) hosting political parties in conducting their internal business;
 - (c) hosting individual members in dealing with constituency matters; and
 - (d) facilitating attendance at meetings with other parties and/or council officers.

The recent members' survey produced a very clear finding that, in addition to hosting the main political meetings (Council, Committees, DPP etc) members feel that the City Hall is also the best place from which to conduct day-to-day party and constituency work. This has obvious implications for the future use of the City Hall in that it requires a fairly large footprint within the building, whether the parties move back into the areas previously used as party rooms or to a new area within the building specifically designed to reflect party size. (This decision will also presumably be affected by the outcome of the Review of Public Administration, which may increase the number of members who require accommodation).

2. as a civic building, which could involve some/all of the following:-
 - (a) maximising tourist potential through enhanced tours and increased public access;
 - (b) enhancing access to the prestige functions rooms and other areas of the building;

- (c) celebration of the city by way of exhibitions, displays etc;
 - (d) providing an historical perspective on the development of the city, including public archives, art, artefacts and other library material;
 - (e) incorporating the Visitor & Convention Bureau following the expiry of its existing lease in 2010, which would significantly increase footfall in the building and, in turn, increase the viability of other potential activities including for example a catering franchise; and
 - (f) incorporating the Consumer Advice centre.
3. as an administrative building, which would involve:-
- (a) providing office accommodation for essential BCC officers and support staff;
 - (b) providing an operational base for a range of citizen-facing services, most notably Births, Deaths, Marriages & Civil Ceremonies, the Cemeteries office, Building Control, Consumer Advice etc.
4. as a source of revenue, which would involve:-
- (a) seeking appropriate external partners to lease areas of the building on a commercial basis, with a view to introducing retail, food & beverage and other private sector facilities.

It will therefore be necessary to engage with members in order to seek a cross-party consensus on the most appropriate split between the political, civic, administrative and economic uses of the building, following which officers can develop detailed alternative layouts and approaches for members' consideration.

As refurbishment work has commenced in the City Hall, it is important that decisions in respect of the future use of the building are taken promptly, in order that the layout of the building can be appropriately configured and incorporated into the programme for the works, minimise any additional costs and/or delays and to factor in any overall accommodation use which will no longer be catered for in the City Hall.

Site visit

Members may wish to consider visiting the site to view the progression of the works.

Adelaide Exchange

Members are asked to consider whether a Members Common Room to be formed on the third floor, by the amalgamation of two of the existing meeting rooms. Members are asked to note that there has been significant use of the meeting rooms by Members in Adelaide Exchange as shown in the table below.

Month	Working days	Bookings	
	October	(13 days)	15
	November	(22 days)	32
	December	(18 days)	14
	January	(22 days)	41
	February	(10 days)	23
	Total	(85 days)	125

Resource Implications

The anticipated project expenditure for the Major Works contract, based on the accepted tender, is £11,875,000.

The anticipated final account is projected to be within the approved budget with the exception of the cost of any variations not yet approved.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report and determine:

1. whether a site visit to the City Hall should be arranged;
2. whether a Members Common Room should be provided in Adelaide Exchange.
3. whether Members want to consider alternate options as to use of City Hall, and if so, to agree to an options paper to be considered in April.”

The Director outlined the main aspects of the report and indicated that there were a number of decisions which the Committee was required to take in relation to potential variations which were being considered for incorporation into the project. With regard to the emergency room relocation, which had been estimated at a cost of £450,000, he stated that an application for funding had been made to the Northern Ireland Office. However, whilst that organisation had indicated that it would not be providing funding, the Police Service of Northern Ireland had agreed to fund the emergency room in the sum of £100,000, with the remaining amount of £350,000 being provided by the Health and Environmental Services Department from the underspend in its current budgets. He pointed out that the proposal to relocate the control room had been withdrawn and that a report on the upgrade of the telephone exchange room would be submitted to a future meeting.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to defer consideration of the question of the relocation of the emergency room to enable a report providing details on how the Health and Environmental Services Department proposed to finance the proposal to be submitted to the next monthly meeting of the Committee;
- (ii) to undertake a site visit to the City Hall in conjunction with the site visit to Clarendon House which had already been agreed by the Committee;
- (iii) that a Members' Common Room be not provided in the Adelaide Exchange; and
- (iv) to an options paper regarding the future use of the City Hall being submitted to the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held in April.

Capital Programme

The Director of Improvement reported that the Council's Capital Programme had not as yet been endorsed politically and would have a major impact on the City Investment Strategy. Therefore, it was proposed to hold, during March and April, briefings for the Party Groupings on the Council in order to provide Members with an opportunity to consider the draft Capital Programme, together with reports on the City Investment Fund and Asset Management. However, the undernoted Capital projects required to be advanced urgently for a number of reasons:

Duncrue Complex: Fuel Storage Facilities and Associated Infrastructure Works

The Committee deferred consideration of the replacement of the Duncrue Complex fuel storage facilities and associated infrastructure works to enable a report on the possibility of the Capital costs for the scheme being met by a private sector operator under a franchise agreement for the purchase of fuel to be submitted to a future meeting.

Sports Surfaces - Grosvenor Recreation Centre and Ballysillan Leisure Centre

The Director explained that it was routine for the Council to create standing Select Lists of contractors from whom tenders would be invited for the provision of various types of sport surfaces as required. Applications for inclusion on the aforementioned Select Lists of potential contractors had been invited by public advertisement and reports regarding the invitation of tenders would be presented to the Committee if and when the projects were being proposed for development during the terms of the standing Select List. He pointed out that two such proposals, in relation to artificial sports surfaces at the Grosvenor Recreation Centre (in conjunction with St. Joseph's Primary School and part funded by the Big Lottery Fund) and the Ballysillan Leisure Centre, were currently programmed for construction during the summer period.

The replacement of the pitch at the Grosvenor Recreation Centre, which was to be 85% funded by the Big Lottery Fund, had previously been postponed since the site was being utilised during the Westlink widening scheme, which was now nearing completion. The existing Ballysillan Leisure Centre pitch had been in operation since 1995 and the surface had been removed several months previously as it had reached the end of its operational life leaving a tarmac hard surface which, due to safety concerns, could not be used operationally. The nature of the proposed works was such that they should ideally be undertaken during the summer months. Tender documentation was currently being prepared for each of the aforementioned projects and tenders would be evaluated on the basis of quality and cost in order to ascertain the most economically advantageous. It was envisaged that the projects would be amalgamated into a single tender/contract if it was considered to be to the Council's advantage. The draft 2008/09 Capital Programme included amounts of £975,000 for the project at the Grosvenor Recreation Centre and £650,000 for the project at the Ballysillan Leisure Centre.

The Committee approved the commencement of the tendering exercises for the replacement of the pitches at the Grosvenor Recreation Centre and the Ballysillan Leisure Centre and to application being made to the Department of the Environment for sanction to the raising of the loans for the cost the two projects. The Committee agreed also that, prior to the meeting of the Council scheduled to be held on 3rd March, the Members be provided with information in relation to the process for prioritising those pitches which should have their surfaces replaced.

Duncrue Industrial Estate:
In-Ground Gas Extraction System

The Committee was advised that the Council was required, under legislation, to undertake steps to mitigate any risks arising from methane which might emanate from the ground at the Duncrue Industrial Estate. The existing in-ground gas collection system at the Estate was nearing the end of its operational life and the Capital Programme included an amount of £230,000 for its replacement.

The Director of Improvement expressed the view that, due to health and safety considerations, the work should be executed as a matter of urgency. Applications for inclusion on a Select List of potential contractors had been invited by public advertisement and tender documentation was currently being prepared. Tenders would be evaluated on the basis of quality and cost in order to ascertain the most economically advantageous.

The Committee approved the commencement of a tendering exercise in respect of the in-ground gas extraction system at Duncrue Industrial Estate and to an application being made to the Department of the Environment for sanction to the raising of a loan for the cost of the project.

Good Relations and Equality

(Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager, attended in connection with these items.)

Minutes of Good Relations Steering Panel

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Steering Panel held on 8th February.

Peace III – Revised Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Good Relations Manager submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware that a draft Peace Plan, approved by Council on 1 October, was out for public consultation during October and November 2007. The Consultation Document outlined how we proposed to manage and deliver Peace III funding under the priority 1.1 ‘building positive relations at the local level’.

Every effort was made to ensure wide public awareness of the Council's proposals and an extensive consultation process was undertaken:

- **the full Consultation Document was available on the Council's website**
- **a press release was issued in the name of the Lord Mayor**
- **articles were published on the NICVA e-Bulletin and the Community Relations Council's Information Bulletin**
- **advance notice was sent to the 5 District Partnership Boards, requesting them to issue attached fliers to their own local organisations and inviting them to organise an event in their own area**
- **fliers were issued to over 650 groups on our Good Relations mailing list**
- **a letter was issued to the major statutory bodies in Belfast**
- **an article was included in *City Matters*.**

We organised 4 meetings in the north, south, east and west of the city in the last week in October. We ensured that special sessions were held with representatives of S 75 groups, young people, older people and women (all target groups identified by the SEUPB). In addition we responded to 9 additional requests for meetings with various sectoral interests.

Good Relations Unit staff made presentations on the Council's proposals at all these events and we had a pool of 6 independent researchers, chosen from the Community Relations Council's select list, who facilitated the discussion at the consultation meetings. We engaged Gráinne Kelly (who co-devised the principles of peace and reconciliation used by the SEUPB) to collate all the responses made both at the consultation sessions and in written submissions and produce a final report for the Council.

Altogether over 220 participants, representing 125 organisations, took part and we received 15 written submissions. A copy of Gráinne Kelly's full report along with a table summarising the key points raised during consultation and the Council's response to those points are included as Appendices to the revised Peace Plan.

Key Issues

As a result of comments and suggestions made during the consultation, some substantial changes have been made to the document. The principal differences are:

1. There is more detail around the guiding principles, values and vision.
2. The Action Plan is more detailed, with specific proposals and named partners.
3. There are up-dated references to the Programme for Government and the Chicago visit.
4. There is a detailed report on the extensive public consultation exercise undertaken in relation to the Peace Plan.
5. The Good Relations Partnership will be established in shadow form as quickly as possible so that the Partnership members may be fully trained in preparation for their roles and may begin to start firming up the criteria to be used in determining applications for funding. The shadow Partnership will be reviewed in 6 months time, in line with SEUPB advice.
6. There was considerable discussion around the composition of the Partnership and the revised recommendation is:
 - elected Councillors – 6, one from each political party group
 - voluntary/community sector – 4 nominees

- other statutory agencies – 2 nominees from the Belfast Chief Executives' Group
- trade unions – 2 from ICTU
- private business sector – 2, one each from CBI and Belfast City Centre Management
- churches – 2, one each from the Protestant and Catholic churches
- minority faith groups – 1 nominee from appropriate organisations
- minority ethnic groups - 1 nominee from appropriate organisations.

Subject to Council approval, letters will be issued in the next couple of weeks to relevant organisations and umbrella bodies, commencing the selection process and inviting nominations from appropriate representatives for the Good Relations Partnership.

7. The proposed Good Relations Learning & Development Strategy has been withdrawn, as most respondents felt that the principal beneficiaries of this would be Council employees and not those in the wider community. This will be re-submitted in due course under priority 2.2 of the Peace III Programme 'developing key institutional capacities for a shared society', which is more appropriate for this project^{4[1]}.
8. The Council's bid is for an amount of £12 million or €18 million; this figure includes the additional staffing required and our projected management costs of just under 10% of the total.
9. The Action Plan outlines the proposed methodology for implementation. To retain a strategic outcome focused approach and ensure that the activities under the Plan are delivered in a co-ordinated and coherent manner, we will commission the majority of the work (80%) and distribute 20% of the funding by way of open calls. This is based on advice from SEUPB and other EU funders, who recommend that open calls should be reduced, as the assessment of these is very resource intensive and often results in a low success rate for applicants. The SEUPB have agreed with this 80/20 ratio.
10. We will also set up a small grants scheme of up to £500,000 per year (assuming a successful bid of £12m).

^{4[1]} Learning and Development Strategy only included under priority 1.1 on SEUPB advice

11. The proposed timescale for the delivery of the Peace III Programme will have to be postponed as the SEUPB now inform us that they will require a minimum of 13 weeks from the time they receive our final Plan until they are able to make any decision. We hope to be able to submit our Plan in early March so may not receive any response until around May 2008. Although we may begin to draw up procedures and draft up Job Descriptions etc for anticipated staff in a parallel process at this time, we will not be able to advertise or begin a recruitment process until we receive a formal SEUPB notification of offer.^{5[2]}
12. The SEUPB have also informed us that they expect spending targets to be even over the period of the Plan. Our original proposal was that most expenditure would take place in the later years of the Plan so the spend targets have also been revised.
13. SEUPB have agreed to train our financial staff in EU procedures when we receive their Financial Guidelines, promised in May 2007.
14. Various minor textual changes have also been made and these are outlined in the Consultation Summary Table.

Recommendation

This Peace Plan was considered and approved by the Good Relations Steering Panel at its meeting on Friday 8 February.

The Committee is requested to consider the content of this Peace Plan and approve it for submission to the Special EU Programmes Body following ratification by Council in early March.”

The Committee approved the Peace Plan, a copy of which was available on the Modern.gov site, and agreed that it be submitted to the Special European Union Programmes Body.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Review of Priorities for Youth – 2008 Onwards

The Committee noted receipt of correspondence from the Department of Education which indicated that it was the intention of the Department to initiate a process to examine the Priorities for Youth within Northern Ireland which would build upon the current Strategy for the Delivery of Youth in Northern Ireland 2005-2008.

^{5[2]} The Committee is reminded that the Peace III Programme officially started in January 2007

The Committee noted also that an inter-Departmental Working Group had been established by the Council in order to consider an appropriate process for developing a Corporate Strategy for Children and Young People and an accompanying implementation framework. A detailed report setting out the proposed development process and seeking the views of Members would be submitted to the Committee in due course. The ongoing work being undertaken as part of this process would enable the Council to take a more informed and evidence-based approach to engaging with and informing the pending consultation process which would be initiated by the Department of Education and to advocate and lobby on behalf of the citizens of Belfast.

**Consultation "Every School a Good School:
A Policy for School Improvement"**

The Committee was advised that the Department of Education was undertaking a consultation exercise in respect of its new draft School Improvement Policy entitled "Every School a Good School". This was an important policy area aimed at improving school performance and followed a review of the Department's current policy.

The Committee agreed that, in line with the Committee's previous decisions and approach to consultation exercises undertaken by the Department of Education, the document be referred to the Party Groupings on the Council for individual consideration and comment.

**Northern Ireland Sex Offender Strategic Management
Committee - Request to make a Presentation**

The Committee was advised that correspondence had been received from the Head of Communications, Northern Ireland Sex Offenders Strategic Management Committee, requesting an opportunity to make a presentation to the Committee on the subject of the assessment and management of the risk posed by sex offenders in Northern Ireland.

The Committee agreed that a briefing session, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, be held for this purpose.

Chairman