

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd May, 2008

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor D. Dodds (Chairman); and
Councillors Adamson, D. Browne, M. Browne,
W. Browne, Convery, Crozier, Hartley, Kirkpatrick,
Lavery, Long, Maginness, A. Maskey, P. Maskey,
Newton, Rodway, Smyth and Stoker.

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

(Councillor Hartley, Deputy Chairman, in the Chair.)

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Hanna and McCann.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st May, subject to:

- (i) the decision under the heading "Growing the Rates Base – Future Importance of Tall Buildings in Belfast" being amended to provide that the Council will seek to preserve the City's built heritage, improve the quality of new build to provide iconic and distinctive buildings and that such buildings should be clustered within the City centre in order to promote economic growth; and
- (ii) the amendment of the decision under the heading "Post Office Consultation" to provide that a letter be forwarded to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister expressing the Council's concern at and seeking the support of the Assembly for its opposition to the proposed Post Office closures.

Modernisation and Improvement

Review of Public Administration - Taking the Process Forward

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

1.1 As Members will recall, on 31st March, 2008 the Environment Minister, Arlene Foster MLA made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the final recommendations of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and the future shape of Local Government within Northern Ireland. In her speech, the Minister stated that the current 26 District Councils would be reduced to 11 and a range of additional functions would transfer to Councils.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Members will accept that we are rapidly approaching a critical stage in the RPA process and in defining the future shape and role of local government in Northern Ireland. There are a number of issues which need to be considered in moving the RPA process forward.

2.2 Critical Path

2.2.1 It is important to recognise that the key driver over the next 6 months will be the need to meet the necessary legislative timetable. The critical path works back from the Local Government Bill which will give affect to the new local government structures. The key milestones in the RPA process are outlined below:

- Boundaries Commissioner appointment released - April 2008**
- Boundaries Commissioner appointed - July 2008**
- Establishment of Transitional Committees – July 2008**
- Instructions to legislative Counsel – August 2008**
- Report of Boundaries Commissioner - June 2009**
- Local Government Miscellaneous Bill – Mid 2009**

- Report of District Electoral Area Commissioner - July 2010
- Local Government Legislative Bill in place - January 2011
- Local Government Elections - May 2011

2.2.2 DoE has indicated that there is an immediate requirement for policy development in the areas of governance, community planning, central/local government relations, HR and estates as instructions to Legislative Counsel are required by August 2008.

2.3 Delivery Structures

2.3.1 In terms of delivery structures, Members will be aware that it is intended that a two-tier model will be developed consisting of a Strategic Leadership Board and three Policy Development Panels. It is proposed that the Strategic Leadership Board should fulfil the role of Council providing overall direction to the process and the Policy Development Panels should fulfil the role of Council Committees. A series of task and finish working groups will be established principally comprising of officers from both central and local government. The working groups would be tasked with undertaking the detailed work programmes and reporting back to the Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels (PDP).

2.3.2 Members will accept that the current level of capacity within the Local Government sector to engage appropriately within these structures is limited. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the Council, if deemed appropriate, to nominate relevant officers onto the respective work streams of the PDPs. Initial officer suggestions are outlined in Appendix 2 and are based on the Council's engagement in the original RPA Working Groups.

2.3.3 In terms of making political nominations to the PDPs, it is intended that the NILGA nominating officers, through discussions within their respective Party Groups, will lead this process. Accordingly, each Party Group leader within the Council has been encouraged to engage at a Party Group level to ensure adequate consideration is given to Belfast Elected Members within the nomination process for the PDPs.

- 2.3.4 Members will note that, at best, the Council may secure one officer place on each of the PDPs and, therefore, it is intended that appropriate internal support mechanisms would be put in place to ensure emerging issues are given due consideration and a corporate position articulated.
- 2.3.5 Consideration needs to be given to the resource and capacity implications of the Councils participation on the SLB and PDPs given that business as usual and other internal reforms must be delivered.
- 2.4 **Belfast as the Continuing Authority**
- 2.4.1 Members will accept that the circumstances for the Council are unique given the position of Belfast City Council as one of the only local government bodies that will provide a degree of continuity throughout the change process.
- 2.4.2 In terms of transitional arrangements, Belfast is somewhat ahead of the game given the fact that it will not need to give significant consideration to the amalgamation of the Council with other surrounding local authorities, but rather can focus its consideration and efforts on how the transferring functions are to be integrated within the Council and the impact this would have on organisational structures, systems and processes.
- 2.4.3 In this regard, it would be appropriate to focus potential testing of transferring functions or initiating pilots on Belfast as the closest representative example of the form of local authority structure that will exist, post RPA, under the 11 Council model.
- 2.4.4 This would also provide the Council with a strong platform to take forward accelerated work around local government modernisation and make bids for associated modernisation funding. This work would need to be considered within the context and align with the Council's own ongoing modernisation work.
- 2.4.5 The commencement of pilot initiatives and the development of necessary policy frameworks would form the logical preparatory stages of any transitional or shadow process associated with the full transfer of functions. It would also provide the opportunity to strengthen institutional and working relationships with transferring departments in the immediate future.

- 2.4.6 The Environment Minister, Margaret Ritchie MLA, has indicated her willingness to investigate trial-blazing pilots with Belfast around the transfer of Urban Regeneration functions. Consideration should be given to the possible extension of such pilots to give expression to the wider community planning agenda and addressing the quality of life issues which affect our city and its people.
- 2.4.7 This approach would have to be predicated on more detailed consideration of the potential structures and processes necessary for the assimilation of the new functions into the current Council organisation.
- 2.4.8 The Council, at both political and senior officer level, need now to start thinking strategically of how the Council could take full advantage of and engage with the RPA and local government modernisation processes and how the transferring functions will be incorporated within and managed by the Council.
- 2.4.9 There is a compelling need for political engagement between the Council and the Ministers responsible for transferring functions. It is therefore suggested that once the Council's Corporate Plan is agreed, the Chair of Strategic Policy and Resources should request meetings with relevant Ministers for a cross party delegation comprising the Committee Chair and a representative from the Alliance and PUP to discuss alignment of the Council's Corporate Plan with the Departmental Plans of relevant Ministers.
- 2.5 Potential Impact on Organisational Structure
- 2.5.1 The RPA as outlined in the statement by the Minister in March 2008 will involve a different set of relationships and functional responsibilities for local government in Northern Ireland.
- 2.5.2 The approach to these changed relationships and potential operations will be critical in shaping a new structure for local government that has both the ability and powers to deliver the enhanced responsibilities envisaged under the RPA.
- 2.5.3 If the Council is to demonstrate that it is an organisation 'fit to lead and serve'; it needs to get its own house in order and clearly define its desired outcomes from the RPA. Greater clarity and understanding is required to enable the

Council to move forward and pursue an approach that seeks to integrate transferring functions in a manner that supports the development of broader Council agendas around community planning and area based regeneration.

- 2.5.4 Consideration must be given to the necessary changes to the existing Council structures and processes to ensure that the transition and integration of new functions is managed and the implications and opportunities arising from the published RPA proposals align with the emerging corporate priorities.
- 2.5.5 There is a clear need for the Council to progress the internal consideration and processes that will prepare the organisation and lay the foundations for increasing engagement and integration of transferring functions (e.g. Planning, Urban Regeneration, Community Planning), in advance of statutory transfer. It is essential to develop an approach to the assimilation of the functions that presents a coordinated engagement, consistency and relates to an overall vision or objective for the Council. In so doing, the Council could call for a more meaningful and accelerated process for the transfer of functions.
- 2.5.6 In preparing for the statutory transfer of functions, it is equally important that a corporate approach be taken to engaging with transferring Departments.

2.6 Change Strategy & Readiness

- 2.6.1 Rather than seeing all the different strands of the RPA as separate and competing elements, a corporate approach will be taken to bring all the pieces of the jigsaw together. Discussions on corporate priorities will provide a basis for deciding how the change process is managed through the implementation of a comprehensive change management plan and, importantly, how the new functions are to be integrated into the Council's structures.

2.7 Programme Management

- 2.7.1 Members will note that work is already underway within the Council to develop an effective Programme Management model that aligns with the new approach to corporate planning and performance management.

- 2.7.2 Members will note further that early discussion with the DoE RPA programme management team has revealed alignment in the approaches being taken by both the DoE and Council. This will be further developed by the Council's Strategic Programme Manager in liaison with Chief Officers and elected Members.
- 2.7.3 At this stage, early recommendations would be that an interim internal programme management board (as part of the development of a wider programme management framework) to be established, chaired by a Chief Officer, to oversee the RPA programme of work. This group should be supported, as necessary, by working groups and/or technical advisors, for different strands of activity.
- 2.7.4 A critical element in relation to the effective implementation of the RPA is ensuring that appropriate structures are in place to secure the necessary political engagement and ownership of the RPA change process.
- 2.7.5 It will be important that the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is kept updated and have ownership of the change process given their responsibility for the integration of strategic planning within the organisation and for the allocation of resources in the form of finance, people and assets.
- 2.7.6 Members will also be aware that there is a RPA Members Working Group which would be another important mechanism for discussing emerging issues and testing possible solutions in advance of detailed consideration by the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
- 2.8 **Capacity and Resources**
- 2.8.1 Inevitably, the level of RPA related activity will grow in intensity and scope throughout the transitional period and its management and delivery must be adequately resourced and co-ordinated. A balance must be maintained between ensuring the effective management of the change process and delivering business as usual.
- 2.8.2 It is important to recognise that delivering the Council's new Corporate Plan, refocusing service delivery on a thematic and area basis and delivering major projects is highly resource intensive. This may be further exacerbated and become increasingly difficult to deliver as the RPA process begins to take pace. The current capacity within the Council is overstretched and needs to be reviewed inline with the Council's Corporate Risk Registrar.

- 2.8.3 Therefore, it is recommended that consideration be given to the establishment of a call-of list of consultants and interim project managers to assist with the delivery of RPA related projects or alternatively to support the implementation of existing projects and thus releasing Council officer capacity to focus on the RPA.
- 2.8.4 It is important that the level of resources allocated to managing the RPA change process is appropriate to the task. Therefore, Members are asked to consider the establishment of a RPA transition fund, the financing of which would be through the realignment of internal resources. setting the value of such a fund and agreeing on how it would be financed. It is recommended further that the Council's Director of Finance would work up detailed proposals on the realisation of such a fund which would be brought back to Committee in June for consideration along with a detailed programme of work (as referred to below).

2.9 RPA implementation programme

- 2.9.1 Members will recall that the Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 18th April, had agreed to fund the commission of an independent scoping paper which sets out the key implementation issues for Belfast regarding the Review of Public Administration. This paper should set out a high-level route map, process and programme of activity on how such issues could be progressed. The purpose of such a report will be to act as an Influencing Document which will form the basis of the Council's political discussions with Ministers.
- 2.9.2 It is intended that this initial scoping paper would be brought to Committee in June and form the basis of discussions and engagement with relevant Ministers and transferring function Departments.

3.0 Resource Implications

Whilst there is clearly substantial Human Resource and financial implications attached the Council's ongoing involvement and management of the RPA change process, it will be difficult to quantify until a detailed programme of work is put in place.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) note the establishment of an interim programme management board to manage RPA transition;

- b) agree in principle to the establishment of an RPA Transitional Fund subject to further details being brought back to Committee in June;
- c) consider the establishment of a interim fixed-term call-off list of possible consultancy support and interim project managers to assist, if required, with the delivery of RPA related projects or alternatively to support the implementation of existing projects and thus releasing Council officer capacity to focus on the RPA; and
- d) agree that the Chair of Strategic Policy and Resources and an all party delegation of Councillors seek a series of meetings with relevant Ministers, DSD, DOE, DCAL, DRD, DHSS to discuss transitional work to support RPA implementation and alignment between the Council's Corporate Plan and Departmental Plans."

The Committee adopted recommendations (a), (b) and (d) and agreed to the establishment of an interim fixed-term call-off list of possible consultancy support for the purposes as set out in the report.

Review of Policy on the Location of Public Sector Jobs in Northern Ireland

The Committee was reminded that the Council, in March, 2007, had submitted a formal response to the Northern Ireland Executive's consultation exercise on the Guiding Principles for the Location of Public Sector Jobs in Northern Ireland. Having considered the responses to the initial consultation, the Executive had approved the following two-pronged approach to take the issue forward:

- the establishment of a framework to provide a robust process for decision-making on the location of Review of Public Administration-related bodies; and
- the undertaking of a time-bound review of policy on the location of public sector jobs in Northern Ireland.

In November, 2007, the Department of Finance and Personnel had published a document entitled "Framework to Underpin Decisions on the Location of Public Sector Jobs Resulting from the Review of Public Administration". A Review Team had been established and requested to put forward a set of practical recommendations for the longer term approach to the location of public sector jobs and an agenda for action. In order to inform that process, a draft Council response had been prepared for the Committee's consideration. A copy of the response is set out hereunder:

“1.0 Background

- 1.1** The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the ongoing work in Reviewing the Policy on the Location of Public Sector Jobs in Northern Ireland and supports, in principle, Central Government’s intention to create a coherent and integrated Policy which will inform future decisions on the (re)location of public sector jobs within Northern Ireland. Such key decisions will inevitably have a long-term impact upon the future competitiveness and sustainability of both Belfast and Northern Ireland generally.
- 1.2** The outworking of the Review of Public Administration process will result in a number of public bodies which presently have headquarter premises situated throughout Northern Ireland will ceasing to exist. In relation to, for example, the Health sector, the four Health and Social Services Boards to be replaced by a Regional Public Health Authority and the previous 18 Health Trusts reduced to 5 Health and Social Care Trusts. In education, the four Education and Library authorities will be reduced to a single Education Authority. In addition, the decision to reduce the current twenty-six Councils to eleven will also result in a further rationalisation of the public sector estate.
- 1.3** The cumulative effects of potential headquarter closures could have a significant detrimental impact on many market towns and cities across Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is vital that a robust and transparent policy framework is put in place to ensure that future location decisions are properly informed.
- 1.4** Whilst the designation of employment locations will inevitably remain a territorial issue of contention between District Council areas, with each seeking to improve employment and economic opportunities for citizens, due consideration must be given to the strategic impact and sustainability of (re)location decisions for Northern Ireland plc.
- 1.5** Whilst the Council recognises the need to strengthen regional cohesion, all efforts should be taken to ensure that the strategic significance of Belfast, as both the primary engine for economic growth and regional gateway, as stated within the Regional Development Strategy ‘Shaping Our Future 2025’, is not compromised through future decisions on the location of public sector jobs.

- 1.6 It should be recognised that the public sector has played a significant role over the last decade in supporting the revitalisation of Belfast and has directly assisted in alleviating the traditionally high levels of unemployment and income poverty experienced within the city. The sector remains one of the city's main employers.
- 1.7 Decisions taken by Central Government to decentralise public sector employment from the greater Belfast area must, therefore, be viewed with caution.
- 1.9 Any dispersal policy should not be framed simply in terms of the demographics of public sector jobs location or the need to transfer jobs outside the Belfast area. Rather a strategic approach is required in terms of the locations selected, the numbers, types and grades of jobs and the functions and business units to be relocated – to maximise the benefits throughout Northern Ireland.
- 1.10 Prior to any decisions being taken with regard to the (re)location of public sector jobs, an economic impact study should be commissioned to evaluate the regional impact of the decentralisation of public sector jobs within Northern Ireland.
- 1.11 Consideration needs to be given to the potential longer-term impacts, costs and benefits of any dispersal policy including the social and economic cases for dispersal, the implications for communities and value for money considerations.
- 1.13 Such a policy should take account of existing strategies for equality, sustainable development and targeting social need.
- 2.0 Current Policy Framework
- 2.1 Regional Development Strategy
- 2.1.1 The Council would draw attention to the fact that the Regional Development Strategy identifies Belfast as the dynamic metropolitan core, regional gateway and focal point of the regional strategic transport network. It recognises that the Northern Ireland region as a whole requires a healthy heart and that the Belfast Metropolitan Area, as the largest employment nexus, is the primary engine for the region's growth and prosperity. It further acknowledges that securing a strong and vibrant Capital City and Metropolitan Area is vital to the economic and social well being of Northern Ireland.

2.1.2 Therefore, it follows that any significant decentralisation of jobs from Belfast may have an adverse impact upon not only the economy of Belfast but also on the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. Accordingly, the Council would recommend that prior to any future decisions being taken on the (re)locations of public sector jobs, an economic impact study should be commissioned to evaluate the regional impact of the decentralisation of public sector jobs from the Greater Belfast area.

2.1.3 The Council would note that the Regional Development Strategy sets out a spatial framework for the future growth of the Belfast Metropolitan Area which is underpinned by Strategic Planning Guidance (SPG). The Council would propose that the undernoted SPGs should be taken into consideration as part of the overall policy framework within which future (re)location decisions are based.

- SPG- BMA1: "To create a thriving Metropolitan Area centred on a revitalised city of Belfast" - maintain the role of Belfast City Centre as the primary retail and office location in the Region.
- SPG-BMA2: 'To promote an Urban Renaissance throughout the Belfast Metropolitan Area,' strengthen the role of the BMA as the regional economic driver.

2.2 Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

2.2.1 Any future Policy Framework should have regard to the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP). The central aim of the dBMAP is to strengthen the regional role of the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) as the major gateway to Northern Ireland. Supporting the continued vitality and growth of the BMA would contribute to the continued competitiveness of Northern Ireland.

2.2.2 Due regard should also be given to the Office Study carried out by Colliers CRE as part of the BMAP process and the recommendation put forward that Belfast City Centre should remain the primary office location within Northern Ireland.

2.2.3 Consideration needs to be given to the availability of suitable office accommodation outside of the Greater Belfast area and the current capacity within the office market to accommodate future (re)location decisions.

2.2.4 Traditionally, the Belfast Office Market has been influenced strongly, and at times dominated, by the public sector. This has become less of a feature in recent years and the potential impact of the Government's 'Workplace 2010' Strategy, and associated rationalisation and privatisation of the civil service office estate, may have further adverse implications for the office market.

2.2.5 The service sector and office market are important elements of the Belfast economy and the inclusion of any objectives for even 'limited' dispersal of public sector employment or rationalisation of the Civil Service Estate will have implications for the Belfast economy.

2.3 Workplace 2010

2.3.1 Given that Workplace 2010 is at an advanced stage with Central Government entering into contractual agreements, the Council is concerned that the Workplace 2010 programme will have a bearing upon decisions taken on the (re)location of public sector employment.

2.3.2 As over 60% of the 80+ properties being considered under the Workplace 2010 Strategy are located within the greater Belfast area, the Council would seek clarification on the Governments intentions with regard to Workplace 2010 and its potential linkage and impact upon future civil service employment (re)location decisions.

3.0 Regional Variations

3.1 The Council would strongly encourage the Review Team to recognise the sub-regional variations which exist within Northern Ireland and acknowledge the role of Belfast as the Capital City and key driver for economic growth and competitiveness within the region. There must be greater clarity about geographical differences within Northern Ireland, recognition of local distinctiveness and the importance of sub-regions.

3.2 There is a need to recognise the critical relationship between the long-term success of Belfast and the success of Northern Ireland Plc.

3.3 Current national UK policy reflects this and recognises the role of cities in contributing to overall regional economic growth. The UK 'Core Cities' agenda¹ highlights the important role of core cities in driving regional competitiveness and growth. Certainly, cities are now high

¹ <http://www.corecities.com/coreDEV/coreindex.htm>

on the UK Government's policy and regeneration agendas and are viewed as assets to the national economy². Across Europe Governments have been intervening to stimulate their urban economies with the assumption that this will support wider national growth.

- 3.4 By contrast, in Northern Ireland there is little apparent awareness or recognition of the critical relationship between the long-term success of Belfast and the success of Northern Ireland Plc. This view was reinforced within research commissioned by the Council 'Belfast: City-Region Report'³ which clearly demonstrated the regional significance of Belfast.
- 3.5 Cities act as hubs for employment, culture and are, increasingly, the places where people want to live, work and visit. This has been more recently reinforced by work commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) comparing the UK's 'Core Cities' to their European equivalents⁴ - work that emerged following the Government's major Urban White Paper of 2000, Towards an Urban Renaissance. Certainly, cities are economic drivers with urban-based economic activities accounting for more than 50% of GDP in all countries⁵.
- 3.6 In an Assembly Adjournment debate on 12th June 2007, the Minister with responsibility for the Department of Finance and Personnel, stated that whilst he was 'not unsympathetic to having more public-sector jobs located outside the greater Belfast area', due consideration needs to be given to the importance of the Capital City as a key location.
- 3.7 In line with the Government's Anti-Poverty Strategy 'Lifetime Opportunities' it is important that all decision-makers ensure that appropriate efforts are taken to address area based deprivation and that Government resources and programmes are targeted at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need.
- 3.8 It is important to note that despite the level of regeneration activity experienced by Belfast over recent years, there remain concentrations of multiple deprivation within the city characterised by high levels of unemployment and crime, poor health and low educational attainment. Nine of the ten

² 'Devolution decision making: Meeting the regional economic challenge: The importance of cities to regional growth', ODPM, 2006

³ Belfast: City-Region, Regional Forecasts, 2005 -

http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stateofthecity/docs/belfast_city_region.pdf

⁴ 'State of The English Cities Report', 2004

⁵ A Framework for City-Regions', ODPM, March 2006 - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163567>

most deprived wards in terms of multiple deprivation within Northern Ireland are located in Belfast and 48% of the city's population is living in the highest levels of deprivation within the region⁶.

- 3.9 Huge challenges remain for Belfast in addressing effectively the entrenched Inter-generational problems facing those deprived neighbourhoods within the city which remain unresponsive to public sector intervention. There is no doubt that public sector employment has played a key role in helping to alleviate this problem within the city and has provided a route map for many out of poverty. Almost 60% of all public sector jobs are currently located within the greater Belfast area and public sector employment accounts for 39.5% of overall employment within the city⁷.
- 3.10 Whilst the Council recognises the need to strengthen regional cohesion, all efforts should be taken to ensure that the strategic significance of Belfast is not compromised through future decisions regarding the location of public sector jobs. The Council is not advocating the continued centralisation of public sector jobs within the greater Belfast area but rather seeks to minimise any detrimental impact upon the citizens of Belfast and the regional competitiveness of Northern Ireland of future (re)location decisions regarding public sector employment.
- 3.11 The emerging policy framework should provide ballast between the need to secure regional cohesion, assist in alleviating deprivation, promote social inclusion and enhance the economic and competitive sustainability of Northern Ireland.

4.0 Value for Money Considerations

- 4.1 The Council would advocate the need to undertake a full-economic appraisal of all (re)location proposals for public sector employment, taking account of all associated economic, environmental and social impacts. This means that as well as considering the direct impacts, i.e. relocation costs, the appraisal should also consider the wider impacts on customers, stakeholders and society as a whole. It is important that Government Departments and the wider public sector are fully informed about the social and economic implications of (re)location decisions and that this information is taken into consideration when compiling relevant business cases for the (re)location of public sector functions and employment.

⁶ The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (MDM), 2005,

⁷ Belfast Facts and Figures 2006/2007, Belfast City Council

4.2 Relocation decisions must not be arbitrarily introduced to alleviate growing demands from some commentators for the decentralisation of public sector jobs within Northern Ireland. The final decisions on the location of public sector jobs and employment – in terms of the furtherance of equality, social inclusion, regional cohesion and other knock-on effects – must be properly considered. It should bring about real social, economic, environmental and equality benefits throughout Northern Ireland, and not merely displace unemployment.

5.0 Learning from the experiences of others

5.1 Whilst acknowledging that the conditions in Northern Ireland, in terms of the location of public sector jobs, will differ from elsewhere, the Council, nonetheless, calls for greater consideration to be given to the experiences of other jurisdictions regarding the decentralisation of public sector jobs.

5.2 A recent research paper⁸ considered by the NI Assembly on ‘the relocation of public sector jobs in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland’ examined the experiences of these jurisdictions and the potential lessons for Northern Ireland.

Impact of Relocation - Republic of Ireland Experience

5.3 The Irish Public Service is currently in the middle of implementing a substantial programme that proposes to move over 10,000 civil and Public Service jobs out of Dublin on a voluntary basis. Within the Irish Public Service system, this is referred to as the ‘Decentralisation’ programme. It should be noted, however, that this programme does not envisage any devolution or transfer of decision-making functions or authority currently held by Central Government or Departments to Local or Regional Government level, which is traditionally understood as ‘decentralisation’. As such, the programme should be understood to mean administrative relocation of staff from the Dublin area.

5.4 It was originally intended that most of the administrative relocation programme would be completed by the end of 2007. To date, progress in advancing the programme has been slow, with low levels of up-take for the voluntary programme among senior management. Recent progress reports published by the Decentralisation Implementation Group (DIG) who are overseeing the implementation of the programme have indicated:-

⁸ Research Paper ‘The Relocation of Public Sector Jobs in England, Scotland and the ROI’, 30th January 2008

- many of those opting to avail of the programme are staff who had already moved out of Dublin and were working in other locations
- the majority of moves that have taken place to date are within the Civil, as opposed to the Public Service
- some departments have experienced significant turnover, particularly those that are relocating in full, with reported turnovers in the region of 90% of staff

5.5 Impact of Relocation – Scotland Experience

The main risks attached to the introduction of an affirmative relocation policy within Scotland included:

- disruption in the delivery of services
- the completed relocations did not appear to have had a significant impact on areas of deprivation

5.6 Based on an examination of the evidence emerging from decentralisation policies applied in other jurisdictions, it would be irresponsible to suggest that there is a perfect relocation model which could be applied within the Northern Ireland context.

6.0 Equality and Good Relations

6.1 Belfast City Council believes that it is incumbent upon all policy-makers and service-delivery agencies to acknowledge the divided context within which we work and deliver our services, in order to contribute in a meaningful way to developing better relations within our society. Therefore, the Council would strongly encourage the Review Team to consider the potential equality issues in relation to the location of public sector jobs and would recommend that a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) should be carried out on any emerging policy.

7.0 Human Resources and Industrial Relations

7.1 The Council recognises that there will be complex people management considerations attached to any dispersal decisions and potential social barriers may exist. The Council would recommend that the Review must give detailed consideration to the Human Resource and industrial relations issues in relation to the (re)location of public sector jobs.

- 7.2 The Council would recommend further that proper account be given to existing legislative and regulatory regimes including employment law and other relevant Government policies and frameworks including, for example, 'Lifetime Opportunities'.
- 8.0 **Conclusion**
- 8.1 Whilst the Council would accept the need to both put in place a robust and evidenced-based policy framework which supports more effective decision-making with regard to the future location of public sector jobs and ensure equality and equity across Northern Ireland, it would recommend that such a policy framework needs to take into consideration the regional significance of Belfast and examine the potential longer-term impacts, costs and benefits of any dispersal policy including the social and economic cases for dispersal, the implications for communities and value for money considerations.
- 8.2 As previously stated, the emerging policy framework should provide ballast between the need to secure regional cohesion, assist in alleviating deprivation, promote social inclusion and enhance the economic and competitive sustainability of Northern Ireland.”

The Committee approved the draft response.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

The Committee considered the undernoted report which provided details in relation to ongoing discussions with representatives of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association regarding its relationship with the Council:

- “1.0 **Relevant background information**
- 1.1 Members will be aware of the ongoing discussions over recent months with regard to the Council's relationship with and engagement within the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the concerns of Members in terms of the level of capacity within the Association, the subscription contributions sought from the Council, the value for money received and the lack of representation on NILGA's Executive.
- 1.2 Members will recall that the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 1st September, had agreed to pay the Council's annual subscription to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association for the

period of 2007/2008 to the value of £86,219 – which was based on the previous year's fee plus the rate of inflation (3%) – pro-rata for the period April till September, 2007, with the remaining payment only being made on the basis of NILGA clearly demonstrating that it had taken adequate actions to address the concerns previously documented by the Council.

- 1.3 The Council is currently withholding 50% (£42,110) of its annual subscription to NILGA for the period 2007/2008 with payment only being made on the basis of NILGA clearly demonstrating that it has taken adequate actions to address the concerns previously raised by the Council.
- 1.4 NILGA has recently submitted an invoice for £104,324 for the Council's subscription for the period 2008/2009. This equates to 25% of NILGA's total subscription income and an 11% increase on the Council's subscription charge from the previous year.
- 2.0 Key Issues
- 2.1 On 3rd April 2008, an all-party deputation consisting of the Chairman of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and Party Group Leaders meet with NILGA representatives to discuss the Council's concerns in more detail.
- 2.2 Whilst it was generally agreed that NILGA had made some progress in addressing the majority of issues identified by the Council, there were two areas for which further clarification was sought. Firstly, the Value for Money received by the Council from NILGA and secondly the level of Council representation on NILGA's Executive.
- 2.3 Subsequently, NILGA submitted a formal response, dated 17th April 2008, to the Council outlining proposals on how the Council's representation of NILGA's Executive could be improved and indicating the value added by NILGA to the Local Government Sector generally and not Belfast specifically. This paper also includes an analysis undertaken by NILGA of the Pros and Cons of the Council's continued participation on the Association.
- 2.4 In order to inform Members consideration of this paper and the proposals contained therein, cross-departmental comments were sought, on the basis of officer engagement on NILGA's RPA working group, and are summarised below.

2.5 *Added Value provided by NILGA*

- 2.5.1** Whilst there was a clear recognition of the need for a strong Local Government Association which is highly attuned, responsive and accountable to its constituent Councils and which provides a coherent single voice for the local government sector in Northern Ireland, there was clear acceptance that the Council does not currently require nor avail of the support provided by NILGA to the same extent as the other Councils.
- 2.5.2** The Council is a substantial organisation with a budget of £140million and 2,600 staff. The Council has successfully developed its own internal expertise, capacity and support mechanisms and has a strong in-house policy and communication capacity. It has successfully implemented Members' support and development programmes, developed and coalesced around corporate positions on emerging policy issues and has gained direct access to Ministers and Central Government officials as required.
- 2.5.3** Whilst accepting that NILGA should serve the local government sector on a generic basis and lobby on behalf of the best interests of the entire sector, it has been the Council's experience that NILGA tend to draw on the capacity and experience within Belfast City Council to inform the Associations positions on key policy areas including the Review of Public Administration, European Funding Programmes, Local Economic Development, Waste Management, Planning etc. Council officers play a key role within NILGA's Working Groups.
- 2.5.4** The general view of the Departmental comments received was that NILGA play at best a supporting role, have endorsed the Council's position to some extent, but that the Council is proving the bulk of the expertise in key policy areas.
- 2.5.5** It should be noted that in many instances NILGA are reliant on the input from the Council to expand the evidence base and policy positions taken by NILGA and the limited added value provided by NILGA in developing the Council's own policy positions.
- 2.5.6** Concern has been raised regarding the clear intention of both the NI Executive and Central Government generally to engage solely with NILGA as the representative body for the local government sector and the fact that NILGA has been designated as the key support mechanism and

nominating body for local government participation on the RPA and modernisation negotiation and implementation machinery (i.e. Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels). NILGA is also responsible for nominating elected Members to the European Programme Monitoring Committees and is the local government representative body on other forums including, for example, the Good Relations Forum, the Migrant Workers Sub-Group etc.

- 2.5.7 During the RPA transitional period, hard decisions will be taken, new policy and legislative frameworks developed and a huge change management programme will need to be delivered across the sector.
- 2.5.8 Whilst the Council welcomes the recent new additions to NILGA's staffing complement including the appointments of a Director of Communications, Director of Policy & Strategy and a dedicated European Officer, it would still be concerned regarding the level of capacity.
- 2.5.9 NILGA is a representative body with no direct experience in the delivery of public services, tackling local issues and limited implementation capacity. Therefore, it is essential that the Council be given the opportunity to engage directly and independently with Central Government and develop joint policy frameworks to enable the experiences of the Council to inform the process.
- 2.5.10 The Local Government sector needs to play a significant role in shaping, influencing and informing the policy agenda of Central Government. There is a need to deliver a strong and coherent local authority voice and maximise the sectors contribution and influence. The Council would suggest that the broader range of local government expertise and experience should be utilised in driving forward the reform and modernisation of the sector.
- 2.6 *Representation*
- 2.6.1 The Council welcomes the proposals contained within the Value for Money report regarding the Council securing two additional places (bringing the total to five) on NILGA's Executive. This would equate to 18% representation from Belfast City Council on the NILGA Executive and would be in proportion to the Council's population base which is 18% (277K of 1.7million) of Northern Ireland's total population. It is recommended that the Council request that this additional representation should be formalised within NILGA's Constitution.

2.6.2 It is recommended further that the Council give its support to the other proposals contained within the report regarding:

- a nominated official from Belfast City Council to attend the NILGA Executive meetings; and
- NILGA nominating officers to ensure that no less than one person from Belfast City Council is represented on the new Policy Development Panels.

2.7 *Annual Subscription Charge*

2.7.1 NILGA has undertaken a benchmarking exercise to compare its level of resources (both staffing and financial), membership base and annual subscription rates within those of the Welsh and Scottish Local Government Associations and other representative bodies within Northern Ireland (i.e. NICVA and the Local Government Staff Commission). Whilst on the face of it NILGA's average Council subscription rate is comparatively low at £13.5K, the cost of subscription for Belfast is substantial (i.e. £104,324) given the scale of the organisation and the associated penny rate product on which NILGA's subscription rate is calculated.

2.7.2 On balance, it would be inappropriate to recommend to Members that the Council withdraw from NILGA given the significant change within the local government sector which lies ahead and the central role envisaged for NILGA, as the representative body, in driving forward this process. Equally it would be difficult to justify the payment of the substantial subscription fee in terms of 'Value for Money' considerations and the added value which is provided by NILGA to Belfast. There is a further argument to be made regarding the Council's in-kind contribution towards NILGA in terms of officer support which is substantial.

2.7.3 Accordingly, it is recommended that consideration be given to the Council putting forward to NILGA a more equitable model on which the Council's annual subscription charge may be calculated, i.e., equalling the Council's relative percentage of the total local government budget and population catchment - which both currently stand at approximately 18%. This would equate to an annual subscription charge of £76,230 for the period 2008/2009 and would be a saving of £28,000 on the current annual subscription charge proposed by NILGA. Such savings could be ringfenced to fund activities to address emerging BCC RPA needs.

- 2.7.4 Given the level of engagement which has taken place over recent months and the progress made by NILGA in addressing the majority of concerns raised by Members, it is recommended that the Council release the outstanding 50% subscription fee of £42,110 for the period 2007/2008 so as to enable a clean basis on which to move forward with the aforementioned proposal regarding calculating the Council's future subscription charges.

3.0 Resource Implications

Financial and Human Resources

If the decision is taken to make payment on the Council's outstanding subscription fee for the period of 2007/2008 and/or the proposed reduced subscription fee for the period 2008/2009 this could have a financial burden for the Council of £118,340 (i.e. £42,110 + £76,230).

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to:

- a) endorse proposal that the Belfast City Council should seek to secure 2 additional places on NILGA's Executive;
- b) consider the proposal for a Council officer to attend the NILGA Executive meeting in an observer capacity;
- c) agree to make payment on the outstanding 50% (£42,110) of the NILGA subscription charge for the period 2007/2008;
- d) consider whether it wishes to pay the NILGA subscription for 08/09 of £118,340 in full or whether it wishes to propose to NILGA a revised model for calculating the Council's annual subscription which would be proportion to percentage of population catchment, which for 08/09 would be £76,230."

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor D. Browne,
Seconded by Councillor Stoker,

That the Committee agrees to pay the outstanding amount of £42,110 of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association's subscription charge for the period 2007/08 and, in view of the limited benefits which the Council receives from the Association, agrees also to withdraw forthwith from membership of the Association.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Smyth,
Seconded by Councillor Crozier,

That the Committee agrees to adopt recommendations (a), (b) and (c) as set out in the report and agrees also to pay the Northern Ireland Local Government Association a subscription sum of £76,230 which would be proportionate to the percentage of the Northern Ireland population resident in the Belfast District Council Electoral Area in respect of the period 2008/09.

On a vote by show of hands six Members voted for the proposal and three against and it was accordingly declared carried. The amendment was thereupon put to the meeting as the substantive motion and adopted with six Members voting in favour and three against.

(The Chairman, Councillor D. Dodds, in the Chair.)

Northern Ireland Assembly Liaison

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update in respect of the work which had been undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee noted also that the new Corporate Plan which was currently being developed would identify a number of issues which would require the Council to seek to have closer liaison with the Departments of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Corporate Plan and Performance Management

Performance Management Framework

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the introduction of a performance management framework for the Council:

“Context

At a special meeting in June 2008 Members will consider the Council’s corporate plan 2008 – 2011. A number of key frameworks have been developed to support the implementation and management of the plan. The Financial Framework and HR Framework have already been presented to Committee, the Information Management and Assurance Frameworks are being presented at this meeting as separate reports. The purpose of this report is to present the organisation’s Performance Management Framework which is another key process for aligning the organisation to deliver agreed council priorities.

The remainder of this paper outlines the Performance Framework and highlights the key pieces of work carried out within each element.

Background

Performance management is one of the fundamental building blocks of any organisation. It matters to Belfast City Council as a whole, because it helps to ensure we are achieving what we set out to do, giving value for money to the ratepayer and making the lives of the people of Belfast better. Basically, it is about politicians making decisions on how to make things better based on information about how things are today; officers acting on these decisions and Members making sure that the desired outcomes are achieved. This is the essence of evidence based scrutiny in terms of Members making sure that their agreed priorities are delivered by officers.

The Council's adoption of the Value Creation Map planning process, which has now been rolled out across the organisation, was based on its commitment to place performance management at the heart of planning and to begin to develop capacity and processes to support an overall performance management framework. The recent planning process led by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has built further on this process and has identified emerging priorities and activities for the organisation which need to be translated into specific actions, which are properly resourced, with clear accountability and measurable indicators. These will then be collated, analysed and reported on at regular intervals to Committee, Chief Officers and Senior Managers to ensure the organisation is on target to meet its objectives. The information will also be used to assist in future planning, allocate resources and target areas for improvement. The mechanism for facilitating this is the Council's Performance Management Framework.

The Performance Management Framework

Step 1
Systematically deciding and communicating what needs to be done
Developing Objectives and Priorities



Step 2
Planning for Success
Developing Plans for Implementation



Step 3
Determining if performance is Being Achieved
Setting and Agreeing Performance Indicators and Targets



Step 4
Reporting Information to the right people at the right time
Performance Reporting and Monitoring



Step 5
Taking action for Improvement
Performance Reviews and Targeting Improvement

Step 1 – Systematically deciding and Communicating what needs to be done - Developing Objectives and Priorities

Members and officers have been engaged in the development of objectives and priorities for the Council through the development of the overall corporate strategy. This has been informed by

- What people in Belfast have said they think the Council's priorities should be;
- An analysis of how issues such as population changes and economic conditions are affecting the city;

- An analysis of how the plans of other bodies, such as the Assembly are likely to affect Belfast;
- The views of elected Members as to how they feel the Council can help Belfast achieve its potential and ensure people here have a good quality of life;
- The views of Belfast City Council employees

and has resulted in the agreement of the Council's overall purpose 'to improve quality of life for the in Belfast' through the implementation of a number of strategic themes supported by operational service delivery. Work has been continuing on the further development and refinement of these themes which will be presented to Committee in June and will form the Basis of the Council's Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011.

Step 2 Planning for Success - Developing Plans for Implementation

In a large complex organisation such as Belfast City Council the delivery of the objectives and priorities is through the various plans of the organisation. The roll out of the VCM process across the Council has brought a co-ordinated approach to planning with all services demonstrating how they contribute to the overall purpose. Once agreed the themes emerging from the current strategy development process will be fed into the VCM process and cascaded to services to enable them to include them in their updated plans. Work will also commence on developing implementation plans for the cross cutting elements of the plan and this will be supported by a programme of work. A further report being presented to this Committee meeting outlines how the various plans will link to the financial strategy of the organisation and this will allow Members to make decisions on aligning resources with priorities.

Step 3 – Determining if performance is Being Achieved - Setting and Agreeing Performance Indicators and Targets

The Council's performance measurement framework is based on the VCM and is closely aligned to the strategic planning framework. It facilitates the collection and analysis of performance indicators at every level in the planning system recognising that different information is required by members, managers and directors. Outcomes and objectives can rarely be measured in terms of a single performance indicator so it is important to identify a group that collectively provides a picture of performance. Through the VCM process all plans have developed performance indicators against which the achievement of the plans can be

assessed. At corporate level this has included approximately 150 PIs agreed by Members and Chief Officers. Much work has been undertaken to collect these indicators through various methods including a ratepayer, member and employee surveys. This information has now been used to set a baseline of performance and was reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in March 08. The results were also fed into the planning process and used to inform the emerging themes.

Revised indicators are now being developed to reflect the emerging themes and in particular the various services contribution to the achievement of these themes.

It will also be important to set meaningful targets where appropriate. At corporate level the work to date has concentrated on developing the right indicators and identifying baseline information however in order to drive performance in some areas it will be important to set challenging targets. This process will begin when the final indicators are agreed with targets being set for 2009/10.

Step 4 - Reporting Information to the right people at the right time – Performance Reporting and Monitoring

Intrinsic to the VCM process are the development of Key performance questions - the answers to which enable the organisation to assess if it is achieving its objectives. All the information on the progress of actions and indicators relating to questions and achievement of the priorities will be collated and reported to Members, Chief Officers and senior Managers to inform decision making. Clearly it is important that this information is reported at the right level and in a meaningful way. Recent reports on the performance of the improvement agenda used traffic lights colour coding to highlight good and poor performance and included details of both projects and indicators. The implementation of an automated performance management IT system will help to co-ordinate, improve and cascade performance reporting to all levels of the Council.

The Performance Management System will support a hierarchy of PIs and tasks that are linked through the corporate and service level VCMs. Where necessary indicators and actions can be drilled down to individual services to ensure a clear line of accountability. These will eventually be linked to individual chief officers/ heads of service / senior managers through an appraisal scheme which is currently under development. Phase 1 of implementation of the system will begin in June 2008.

Step 5 - Taking action for Improvement – Performance Reviews and Targeting Improvement

Members and Chief Officers will be supported by CIT to ensure the performance reporting is meaningful and useful. An analysis of progress against both the programme of work, individual projects and relevant performance indicators will assist the decision making process and allow better alignment of resources to priorities. As the performance information develops this analysis will also enable the identification of areas that need to improve. These areas may require specific review to identify issues and solutions. Accountability in the form of the Chief Officer / Senior Manager appraisal system currently being developed by SOLACE will also feed into this aspect of the framework.

Decisions Required

Member are asked to agree the components of the Performance Management Framework.”

The Committee approved the performance management framework.

Strategic Information Management Framework

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Strategic information management is central to the Council’s improvement agenda because it:

- is an essential element of good corporate governance
- provides Elected Members with the right information to support effective decision making
- challenges our thinking on how we deliver services and supports innovation in service design
- sets direction in terms of investment in technology assuring alignment to corporate objectives
- provides the basis of accountability to Elected Members and the citizens of Belfast for the stewardship and use of IT resources.

The purposes of this report are:

- To outline for Elected Members the proposed strategic information management framework for the organisation
- To agree governance arrangements for the development of strategy and delivery of services
- To agree to seek external assistance in the development of strategy within agreed budgets.

Key Issues

Key elements of the Council's strategic information management framework are outlined below:

Strategy and Business Alignment

It is important that the Council invests in the right technology to meet the business objectives of the Council both corporately and at service level. This becomes more important in the context of modernising public services and the drive to deliver efficiency and value for money. It is essential that planning for the use of IT is fully integrated with the financial, capital, human resources and business planning processes of the Council.

Management and Governance

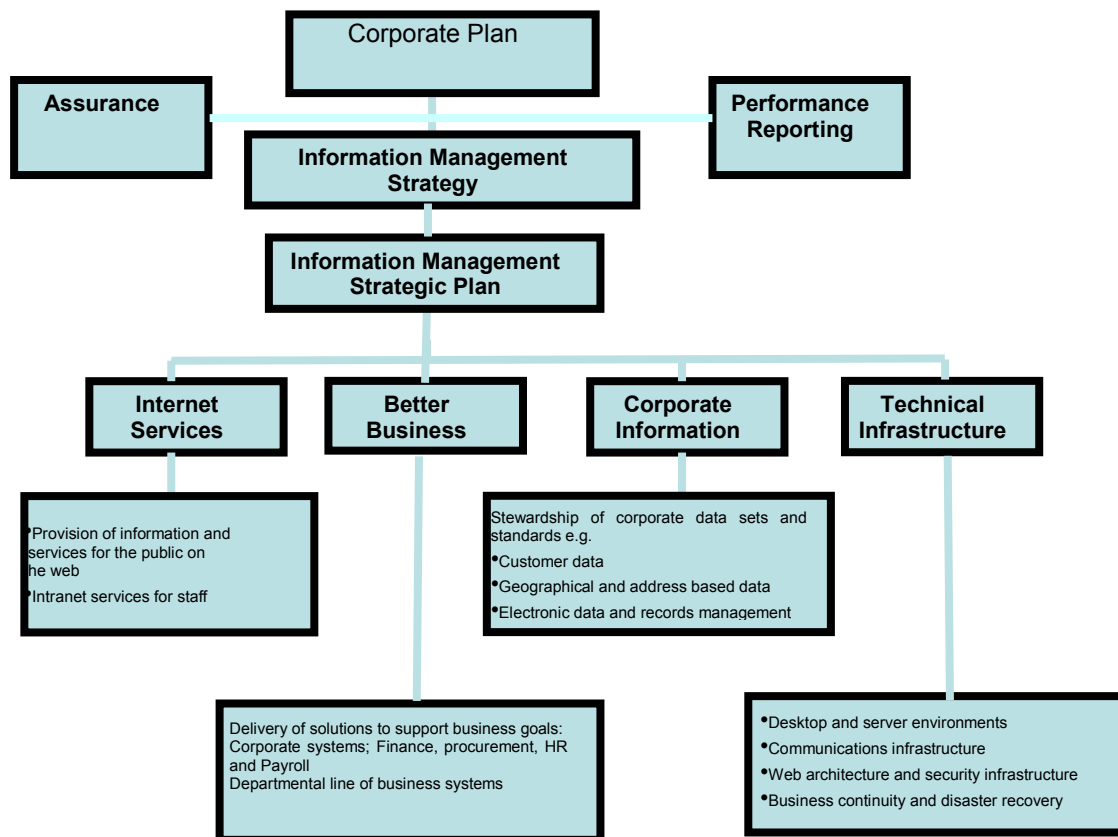
The Council needs to direct and control IT resources to achieve the objectives of the Corporate Plan as well as employing good practices for managing the business operation of IT. Figure 1 outlines the context of the information management strategy in relation to the corporate plan. It is proposed that an information panel of officers is established, chaired by a Chief Officer and reporting to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to oversee delivery of the strategic plan and the work of the sub groups. Assurance that risks and issues are managed and quality outcomes delivered will fall within the remit of Audit, Governance and Risk service whose staff will fulfil a scrutiny role alongside project teams.

Technology and Architecture

A critical element of the framework is the underlying technology infrastructure e.g. communications, and the processes for developing, deploying, enhancing and supporting the business capabilities using technology solutions. It is equally critical that these solutions are measured in terms of their fitness for purpose and return on investment. Reporting on performance of KPIs against targets will form part of the routine reporting on corporate performance to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee.

Organisation and skills

An essential element is the capacity of the Council in terms of its IT skills as well as management ability to deliver change effectively and create and promote an environment of productivity, learning and employee satisfaction.



Summary of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee Forward Work Plan July- October for Information Management

June

- **Establish governance arrangements with Information Panel and appropriate subgroups**
- **Commission work on developing strategy**

Mid July –September

- **Run a series of workshops to determine IM strategic objectives in line with corporate plan, define priorities, assess resource impact and develop strategy and plan.**

October

- **Report on IM Strategy with proposed strategic plan for 2009-2011**

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- 1. Note the contents of the report.**
- 2. Agree to the information management forward work plan for July - October 2008 as outlined above.**
- 3. Agree to commission external assistance to facilitate workshops and development of strategies to report to committee in October 2008."**

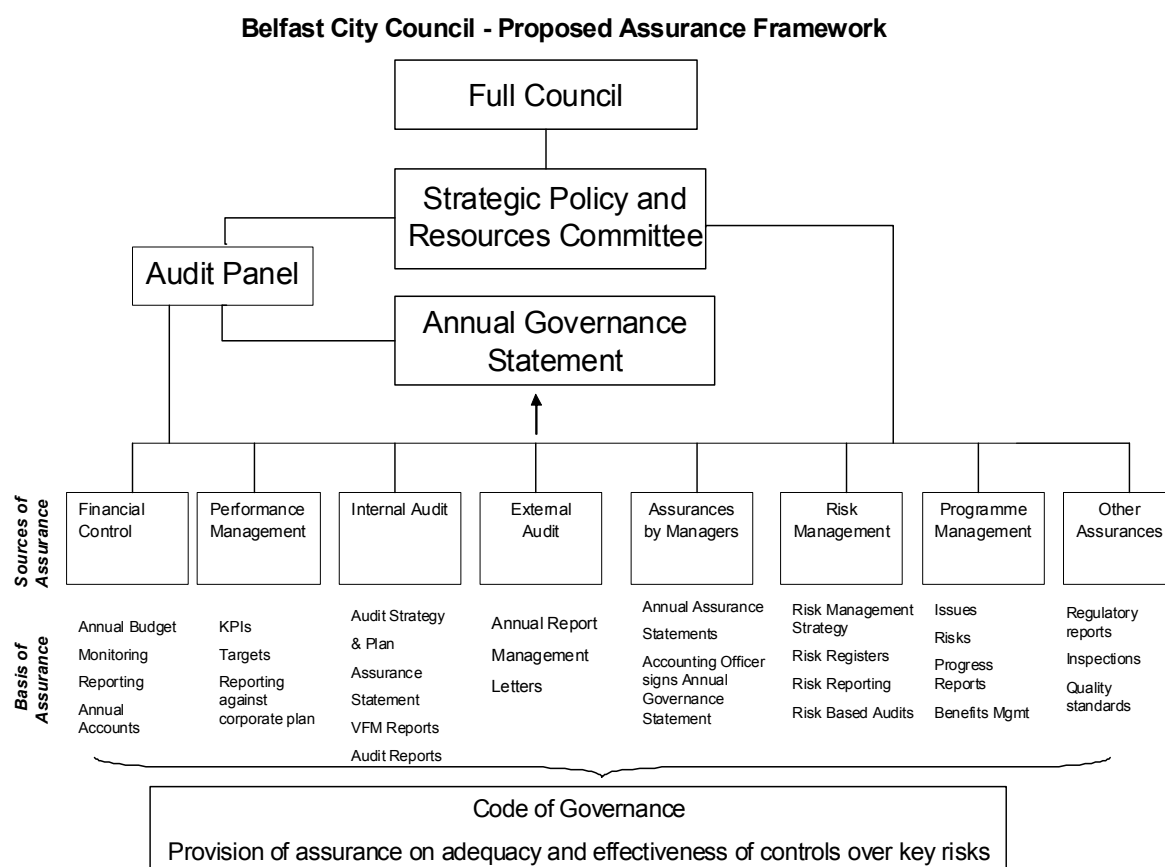
After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that a maximum budget of £30,000 be allocated for the commissioning of external assistance to facilitate the workshops.

Proposed Assurance Framework

The Committee was advised that considerable effort had been put into developing and implementing the key elements of an assurance framework within the Council. Significant progress had been made in terms of:

- implementing a process whereby managers were required to sign an annual assurance statement;
- implementing risk management;
- developing business planning and related performance reporting arrangements;
- reconstituting the Audit Panel;
- developing the professionalism of the internal audit function, including the commissioning of an external review of the service and the planned implementation of risk-based audits; and
- the development of a Code of Governance.

It was now possible to begin to map the key elements of the Council's proposed Assurance Framework as set out hereunder:



The proposed framework showed:

- the main sources of assurance, such as financial control, performance management, internal and external audit;
- how the Code of Governance related to those assurances; and
- the key role played by Audit Panel and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in reviewing and approving the Annual Governance Statement and overseeing the assurance framework as a whole.

As the elements within the proposed assurance framework were developed further, it would be important to provide assurance to the Audit Panel and the Committee that each source of assurance was reliable, that the framework as a whole was adequate and that there were no significant gaps. Much of the detailed work of Audit, Governance and Risk Services was related to reviewing the various sources of assurance and the key elements of the Council's internal control framework and the Service would continue to report to the Audit Panel on those areas. It was planned also to report on the adequacy of the assurance framework as part of the process of completing the 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement.

The Committee noted the Council's proposed Assurance Framework.

Review of Governance Arrangements

Arising of discussion of the previous item, the Committee agreed that a review be undertaken of new Governance arrangements which had been introduced in June, 2007. The review would take into consideration issues such as the themes contained in the Corporate Plan, the work of the Audit Panel and the policy and performance management frameworks.

Review of Remit of Licensing Committee

The Committee agreed also that a review be undertaken of the remit of the Licensing Committee in relation to its delegated authority and that a report thereon be submitted to its meeting scheduled to be held on 20th June.

Code of Governance

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to a Code of Governance:

“Relevant Background Information

At the Audit Panel meeting of 2nd April 2008, the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services presented a paper entitled ‘Annual Governance Statement 2007/08.’ The paper dealt with the implications for the Council of DoE Circular No LG/04/08. The Circular provides guidance to local authorities on how to implement the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006. To recap, one of the key requirements of the Regulations is that the Council must conduct a review each year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and prepare a ‘governance statement’ to this effect in accordance with ‘proper practices.’ This statement will be signed off as part of the annual accounts. The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services submitted a separate report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 18th April 2008 drawing attention to the reporting and ‘sign-off’ arrangements.

The DoE Circular refers councils to the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’ as guidance containing ‘proper practices’ with regard to an effective system of internal control / governance. The Framework is recommended as best practice for developing and maintaining a local code of governance and for discharging accountability for the proper conduct of public business, through the publication of an annual governance statement that will make the adopted practice open and explicit.

The purpose of this report is to apprise members as to:

1. The content of the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'
2. The specific actions that the Council has taken/ proposes to take to meet the requirements of the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework, in particular, the adoption of a local Code of Governance. Members are asked to approve this Code.

Key Issues

1. CIPFA / SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'

Governance, in the context of local government, is about how a council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and, where appropriate, leads its community.

The CIPFA / SOLACE 'Good Governance in Local Government: A Framework' was published in July 2007 and represents best practice for developing and maintaining a local code of governance and making adopted practice open and explicit. It sets out 6 principles of good governance:

1. Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.
2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
3. Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
4. Taking informed transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.
5. Developing the capacity and capability of members to be effective and ensuring that officers – including the statutory officers - also have the capability and capacity to deliver effectively.

6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust local public accountability.

The guidance recommends that councils develop and implement a Code of Governance based on the above principles and recommends that councils:

- (a) Review existing governance arrangements against the Framework
 - (b) Develop and maintain an up to date local code of governance, including arrangements for ensuring its ongoing application and effectiveness
 - (c) Prepare a governance statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own code on an annual basis, including how they have monitored the effectiveness of their governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period.
2. Belfast City Council – Actions Taken and Proposed to Meet Requirements of CIPFA / SOLACE Framework

Action Taken / Proposed to meet the requirements of the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework

- (a) Audit Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) has assessed the Council's governance arrangements against the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework. This review found that, while the Council already has many arrangements in place for good governance, there was scope for further improvements (see (b) below).
- (b) We have developed a draft Code of Governance for Belfast City Council based on the 6 core principles set out in the CIPFA Solace Framework, and a table summarising the key systems, processes and documents that provide evidence of compliance with the core and supporting governance principles, along with the individual or committee responsible for monitoring and reviewing the same. In addition, the table summarises the planned improvement actions (as per the corporate value creation map) that will strengthen governance arrangements. The majority of the planned improvement actions set out within our Code have been taken from the corporate Value Creation Map, so there is no significant additional resource required in terms of implementing improvement actions. We are recommending that the Audit Panel approves the adoption of this Code of Governance.

- (c) We have provided a high level one page summary showing the measures that the Council has in place or is developing to address the key principles of our Code.
- (d) the Council will produce an annual governance statement from 2007/08. In line with DoE requirements, this will comply fully with the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework by 1 April 2009.
- (e) In addition, from 2008/09, AGRS will undertake an annual review of our Code to ensure that the Council is complying with it. The results of this review will be reported to the Audit Panel and will inform the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement. It will form one of the assurances that senior managers and Members receive on the Council's internal control environment.

Resource Implications

There are no significant resource implications.

Recommendations

That the Committee adopts the recommendation of the Audit Panel to approve the proposed Belfast City Council Code of Governance, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

Key to Abbreviations

AGRS	-	Audit, Governance and Risk Services
CIPFA	-	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
DoE	-	Department of the Environment
HR	-	Human Resources
KPIs	-	Key Performance Indicators
LGA	-	Local Government Auditor
OPM	-	Office for Public Management
SOLACE	-	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
VCM	-	Value Creation Map
VFM	-	Value for Money
WDP	-	Workforce Development Plan

Appendix 1

Introduction

Governance is about how Belfast City Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

It comprises the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and, where appropriate, leads its community.

The CIPFA Solace 'Good Governance in Local Government: A Framework' was published in July 2007 and represents best practice for developing and maintaining a local code of governance and making adopted practice open and explicit.

Belfast City Council is committed to the principles of good governance and this Local Code of Governance is a public statement of that commitment.

The Audit Panel approved this Code on...

The 6 Principles of Good Governance

Belfast City Council is committed to the core and supporting principles of good governance set out within the CIPFA Solace Framework, namely that good governance means:

1. Focussing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.
2. Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
3. Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
4. Taking informed transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.
5. Developing the capacity and capability of Members to be effective and ensuring that officers – including the statutory officers - also have the capability and capacity to deliver effectively.

6. Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust local public accountability.

Compliance with the Code

Our Local Code of Governance is supported by systems, processes and documents that determine and control the way in which the Council manages its affairs.

Appendix A demonstrates how the Council currently complies with the Code, in addition to detailing the tasks, projects and initiatives within the corporate Value Creation Map that will further enhance the governance arrangements within the Council.

Monitoring and Review

Using the Corporate Plan Portfolio where appropriate, we have identified the individual or Committee responsible for monitoring and reviewing each system, process and document that underpins our governance arrangements.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services will undertake at least annual reviews of the Council's governance arrangements to ensure that governance arrangements are adequate and operating effectively in practice.

The results of these reviews will be reported to the Audit Panel and will inform the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement⁹ which forms part of the published financial statements."

The Committee adopted the recommendation of the Audit Panel.

Democratic Services and Governance

Arrangements for Somme Anniversary Ceremony - July, 2008

The Committee was reminded that the annual Somme Ceremony took place at the Cenotaph in the grounds of the City Hall in July of each year. A special meeting of the Council preceded the Ceremony and it had been customary for the City Hall to be used as a mustering point for all those involved in the formal proceedings. Although the City Hall would be closed for the Ceremony, access was permitted to the Garden of Remembrance. The closure of the City Hall would, however, necessitate arrangements being made to provide an alternate venue which would act as a mustering point for those involved and prove suitable also for the provision of the required level of hospitality.

⁹ Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006

Following consideration of potential venues within the vicinity of the Cenotaph, the Assembly Buildings at Church House, Fisherwick Place, had proved to be the most suitable. There would be no cost for the use of the buildings, it contained individual function rooms which would be appropriate to the needs of the participants, it had been used previously as a mustering point for similar processions in the City centre and car parking was available in the grounds of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, situated directly across the road from Church House.

The route would be slightly longer than the normal one from the Council Chamber in the City Hall to the Cenotaph but not significantly so and provided an opportunity for the Associations taking part, the Band and Guard to process the short distance through the City.

Discussions had taken place with representatives of the Royal British Legion who had advised that all those participating in the Ceremony would be able-bodied and should not experience difficulty in making the short journey. Following the Ceremony, the procession would return to Church House where tea/coffee and light refreshments would be provided. The proposal met with the approval of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which had confirmed that there would be no difficulty associated with implementing the appropriate traffic and security measures. Church House would be suitable also in that it could accommodate the holding of the Special Meeting of the Council which preceded the Somme Ceremony, thus removing the need to hold a meeting in the current Civic Headquarters at Adelaide Exchange and thereafter merging the Councillors' group with the other participants and moving to the City Hall.

The Committee approved the use of the Assembly Buildings, Church House, to act as a venue for the holding of the Special Meeting of the Council prior to the Somme Ceremony on 1st July, 2008 and to be used to provide tea/coffee and light refreshments following the formal proceedings.

Requests for the Provision of Hospitality

The Committee was advised that the undernoted requests for the provision of hospitality had been received:

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Belfast County Guides	Belfast County Guides Awards Ceremony 20th May 2008 (evening) Approximately 150 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-event drinks reception and Canapés	Girl Guiding is an international, multi-cultural, inter-denominational organisation for young girls and women which promotes good leadership and citizenship amongst its members. This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations	Provision of hospitality in the form of soft drinks and Canapés Approximate cost £1,200 Approximate budget remaining £192,080

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Cavehill Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club	Centenary Dinner for Cavehill Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club 1st October, 2012 Approximately 150 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	This event seeks to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Cavehill Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city.	Provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £600 Approximate budget remaining £191,480
Paediatric Psychology Network	Annual Paediatric Psychology Network Conference 19th June, 2008 Approximately 60 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	It is estimated that 150 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £240 Approximate budget remaining £191,240
Sonorities Festival of Contemporary Music	International Computer Music Conference 24th August, 2008 Approximately 300 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	It is estimated that 350 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £1,200 Approximate budget remaining £190,040
Institution of Highways and Transportation	Institution of Highways and Transportation Conference Dinner 16th September, 2010 Approximately 300 attending	Use of City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	It is estimated that 150 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £1,200 Approximate budget remaining £188,840

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Rotary Club of East Belfast	Rotary Club of East Belfast Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony 12th June, 2008 Approximately 170 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	This Dinner and Awards Ceremony aims to acknowledge the work of the Rotary Club of East Belfast within the city and will recognise individuals who have demonstrated outstanding service through fundraising and their work within the voluntary and community sectors. This request meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Improving quality of life, now and for future generations	Provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £680 Approximate budget remaining £188,160

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Replacement of Lord Mayor's Vehicle

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report seeking authority to invite tenders for the replacement of the Lord Mayor's vehicle to enable a further report providing details on the cost efficiency of renewing the vehicle after three years, five years and ten years to be submitted to the meeting scheduled to be held on 20th June.

Business in the Community Awards

The Committee was advised that the Council had submitted an entry for the Business in the Community – Women in Local Councils Award and had reached the final shortlist. A formal presentation had been made to a judging panel on 16th May and that panel would determine the winner on the basis of the written submission and a presentation. In addition, the Women in Non-Traditional Sectors (WINS) project had submitted an entry in the Diversity category and a presentation had been made also as part of a final selection stage for that award. The winners of both awards would be announced at a Gala Awards Ceremony on 29th May in the Belfast Waterfront Hall.

In recognition of the Council being shortlisted for those prestigious awards, it was recommended that the Council be represented at the awards ceremony by the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), a representative of each of the other Party Groupings on the Council, the Chief Executive (or his nominee) and two officers from each of the projects which had been shortlisted for the awards. The cost of attending would be £885 plus VAT.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Finance

Minutes of Audit Panel

In considering the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel held on 13th May, the Committee's attention was drawn to the recommendations of the Panel in relation to the following issues:

Freedom of Information Requests regarding Gifts and Hospitality Registers

A Member referred to the decision under the heading "Freedom of Information Requests regarding Gifts and Hospitality Registers" whereby the Audit Panel had agreed in principle that a Voluntary Register for Members be established to record offers of gifts and hospitality which were either accepted or declined, subject to the matter being discussed further by the various Party Groupings represented on the Council. He requested that the Committee amend the minute to provide that a Compulsory Register for Members be established.

The Committee agreed to accede to the request.

Analysis of Travel

A Member referred to the minute under the heading "Analysis of Travel" and requested that the full Audit Report on the Analysis of Staff Travel be included on the agenda for the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to be held on 20th June.

The Committee agreed to this course of action.

Adoption of Minutes

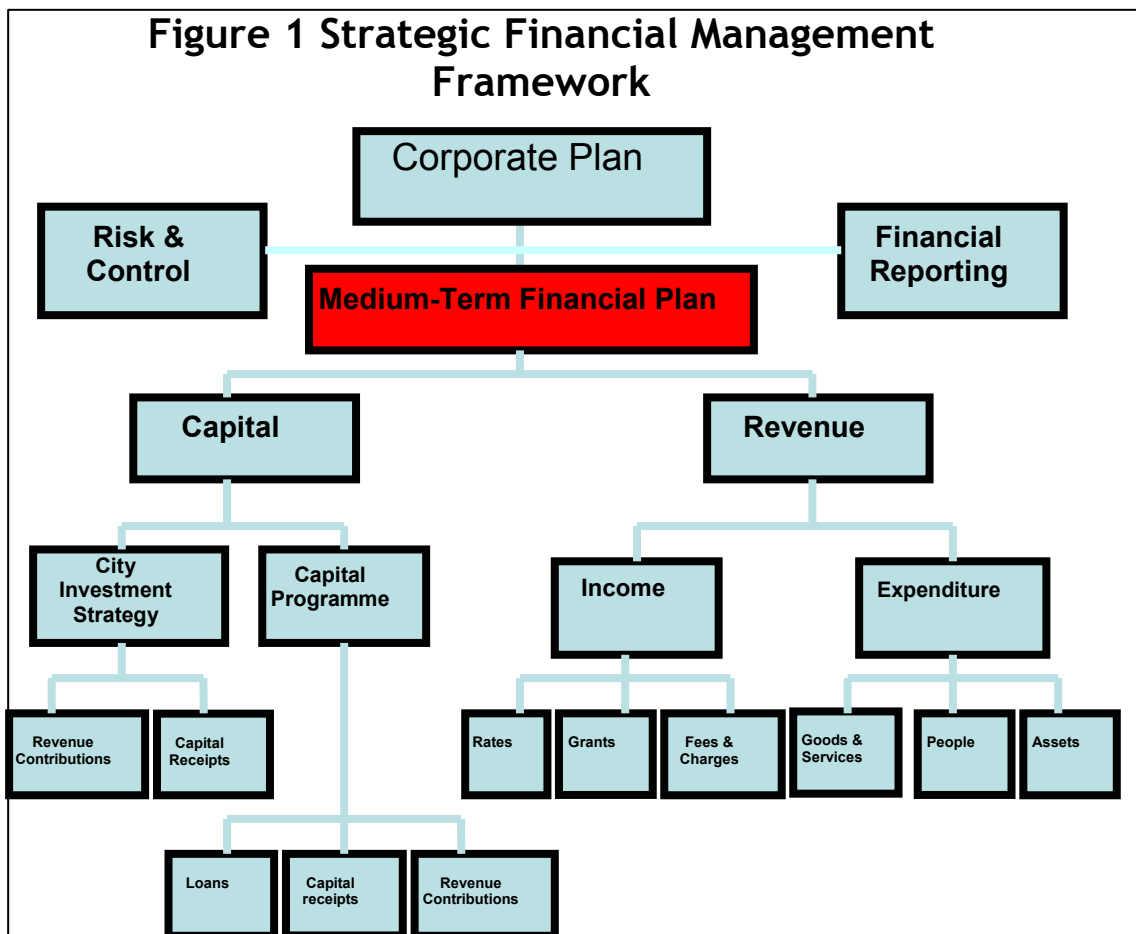
Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel of 13th May were thereupon approved and adopted.

Financial Planning Cycle

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Financial Planning Cycle:

"Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that the Council's strategic financial management framework was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 14 March 2008. As can be seen from figure one below, a key element of this framework is financial planning.



The key outputs of the financial planning processes in the Council are the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Annual Budget which concludes with the setting of the rate. These financial plans are simply a monetary expression of what the Council wants to deliver and therefore they need to reflect our key priorities and objectives. In June 2008 Members will agree a new corporate plan. One of the key delivery determinants of this plan will be the Council's ability to align money to the agreed priorities within the context of an agreed district rate. The most successful organisations have achieved this by ensuring that their business planning and financial planning are very closely aligned. The purpose of this report is to propose a revised planning cycle for the organisation which starts to merge the financial and business planning cycles.

Key Issues

The following paragraphs outline chronologically the key elements of a revised planning cycle.

June 2008

Members will be requested to agree:

- Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011
- Capital Programme 2008/09

Members will receive the following:

- An assessment of the financial performance and standing of the council for 2007/08.
- Notification of the district rates finalisation figure for 2007/08.
- An assessment of key financial external pressures such as inflation.
- Draft efficiency programme

Members will also be requested to provide a range of indicative acceptable rate levels for 2009/10. This information will be needed so that a comparison can be made of draft budgets and plans against affordability.

September / October 2008

Members will receive the following:

- Costed options for taking forward corporate priorities for 2009/10
- Draft core budgets for delivering business as usual activities
- A first indication of the level of income the rates will yield in 2009/10
- An assessment of mid year financial position for 2008/09

October / November 2008

Members will receive the following:

- A comparison of proposed summary budgets for corporate priorities and business as usual against affordability levels and rate yield indication.
- An analysis of funding gaps and trade-off options
- A second indication of the level of income the rates will yield in 2009/10

Members will be requested to:

- Provide direction on trade off between budget and priorities

November / December

Members will receive the following:

- Notification of the level of income the rates will yield in 2009/10
- An assessment of the impact of rate yield on plans and budgets
- Revised summary budgets aligned to plans

January / February

Members will be requested to:

- Agree district rate 2009/10
- Agree summary budgets for business as usual and corporate priorities for 2009/10.

March

Members will be requested to:

- Agree corporate plan year 2 - 2009/10

April

Members will be requested to:

- Agree department plans

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

1. Note of the contents of the report.
2. Agree to the revised planning cycle.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Travel Services - Extension of Contract

The Committee was advised that in November, 2007 a new tender had been advertised for the provision of Travel Services. In response to that advertisement, seven companies had submitted tenders. The estimated value of the contract was £200,000 per annum. The Improvement Manager reported that an extensive evaluation of tenders had been undertaken. However, because of the complex nature of the travel industry, the varying pricing mechanisms which contractors had presented in their tender submissions and the difficulty in making a like-for-like comparison had meant that the Procurement Unit had been unable to make a recommendation. In addition,

it had become apparent, in view of the changes within the travel industry as well the Council's own emphasis towards greater efficiency, that the tender should not be awarded at this stage but rather that further research should be carried out into the most cost-effective approach to contracting the Council's travel arrangements. The Audit Panel had also been conducting an investigation into Council travel which could result in further recommendations which might affect any further travel contracts.

Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee approve the extension of the existing contract with Neill Menary for a period of six months, with the option to extend on a monthly basis thereafter as required, to enable further research to be undertaken.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed that the research include a value-for-money exercise to ascertain whether the work could be undertaken in-house by Council staff.

Human Resources

(Mrs. J. Minn, Acting Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with these items.)

2007/2008 Absence Rates

The Committee was reminded that a robust and corporate approach to the consistent management of absence had been put in place and resources had been prioritised to ensure that every effort was made to minimise absence. This had included the development and negotiated agreement of a new Attendance policy, the identification and monitoring of "hot spots", weekly identification and monitoring of priority cases across the Council, monthly central monitoring of Departmental compliance with absence procedures, the implementation of a case review mechanism and the delivery of a training programme on effective absence management. This had provided a good example of how a central support service could work in conjunction with Departments to deliver a corporate priority. The Acting Head of Human Resources reported that the work had resulted in the reduction in sickness absence of almost two days during the past two years as shown below:

Average number of days sickness absence per full time employee		
2006/06	2006/07	2007/08
15.75	15.08	13.91

The Acting Head of Human Resources then made the following points:

- at the end of the financial year 2007/08 the average number of days of sickness absence per full-time employee had been 13.91 days;
- that had been the lowest figure for absence which the Council had had since 1999/00;

- the Council had reduced its absence by 2,708 days, or 7.75 % for the year;
- over the two-year period the figure had reduced by nearly two average days per person (1.84 days or 11.6%);
- 35% of staff had no absence during 2007/08;
- 65% of staff had less than the Confederation of British Industry norm for the private sector, that is, six days;
- 7.5% of staff had been absent from work on a long-term basis (more than twenty consecutive working days);
- long-term sickness had accounted for nearly 70% of the Council's sickness absence;
- Departmental sizes had a significant impact on the overall sickness figures;
- three Departments had met their annual absence targets – those Departments which had not achieved their targets had either reduced or maintained their 2006/07 figure; and
- all Departments would develop action plans to improve absence rates to achieve their targets as part of the Departmental Planning Process and it would be a performance requirement for all senior managers to develop and implement those action plans in accordance with Council policy.

The Acting Head of Human Resources explained that best practice had indicated that longer term targets for the reduction of absence rates should be set by organisations. Also, the introduction of the new Attendance Policy would take time to imbed. It was therefore proposed that the Council's target should be to reduce its average absence rate to 12 days by 2011. That was a reduction of a further two days and would represent a 14% reduction in the period from 2008/09 to 2010/11. In order to assist the Council in achieving the target, absence management would continue to be a key priority within the Council's Human Resources framework. Work was continuing in order to maintain and improve absence rates, including:

- the implementation of the new Attendance Policy. The Trades Unions had agreed the new policy and work was now underway to develop and agree detailed guidance on its application. A training and communication plan had been developed to ensure effective implementation;
- a review of the Occupational Health Service to ensure that it could support effectively a robust attendance culture;

- ongoing monthly central monitoring of compliance with absence management procedures, weekly identification and monitoring of priority cases across the Council and the effective management of case reviews;
- a programme of health and well-being activities; and
- the setting of performance management targets for all senior managers to develop absence action plans and implement them in accordance with Council policy.

During discussion in the matter, the Members made the point that, whilst the absence figures had shown a downward trend, it was essential for this to be maintained and to ensure that it was attained across all of the Council's Departments. In addition, it was recognised that sickness absence was a major problem but that the Council had been proactive in introducing systems in order to attempt to achieve a decrease in the number of days of sickness absence throughout the Council and would continue to monitor the effect which the new policies had in achieving reductions.

Community Outreach

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- **provide an update on the council's community outreach activities;**
- **provide information in respect of council funding to the Citywide Employability Consortium (CEC) to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.**

Relevant background information:

Committee agreed in February to engage with the Citywide Employability Consortium to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.

The decision as to whether or not the council should part fund this initiative (a proposed contribution of £10,000 per annum, for three years from the corporate workforce development budget) was however deferred.

Members requested a further report on the current council funding to the CEC and an update on the council's community outreach activities.

Key Issues:

Update on community outreach activities:

- The council's community outreach programme was launched in 1998 to promote Belfast City Council as an attractive, equal opportunities employer with wide and varied job opportunities.
- We operate an extensive work experience placement scheme which deals with, on average each year, 200 unpaid work experience placement opportunities for students from schools and further education / university establishments and 40 unpaid disability work experience placements from a range of disability organisations.
- We attend jobs and careers fairs; conduct 'site visits' to promote the council as an attractive employer; provide training and development opportunities for young people on interview awareness skills using mock interview sessions; and deliver presentations to students, teachers and representatives from other organisations e.g. ethnic minority and disability groups to advise them of job opportunities and the council's recruitment and selection procedures.
- The programme has created eight basic grade posts specifically 'ring-fenced' to disabled applicants; operates a 'guaranteed interview' scheme for people with disabilities; has a confidential care-line for applicants whose first language isn't English; has skilled up to 50 front-line council officers on sign language techniques; and issues details of all council vacancies to under-represented groups within the ethnic minority and disabled communities.
- The programme holds the NIACRO award for the fair recruitment of people with criminal convictions; has engaged in an extensive partnership project to encourage women into non-traditional roles; and has attained the 'Gold' Opportunity Now benchmarking award for gender equality. More recently, it has agreed to engage with the CEC to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed.

Council funding to the CEC to develop pre-employment training programme for the long term unemployed:

- **The council currently co-finances, along with the European Social Fund (ESF), projects which are currently run by two of the organisations which comprise the CEC. These two organisations, LEAP (North Belfast) and Stepping Stones (East Belfast), are financed as local employment initiatives to bring together the supply and demand ends of the labour market for private sector development:**
- **LEAP (North Belfast) receives £48,864 per annum from the council to assist with a project to enhance employer and client engagement in North Belfast with a view to increasing employability of local people. The project aims to place approximately 300 local people in employment over the three year period of the programme; and**
- **Stepping Stones (East Belfast) receives £32,665 per annum to assist with a project to enhance employer and client engagement in East Belfast, focussing on addressing the needs of small businesses. The project aims to place approximately 220 local people in employment over the three year period of the programme.**
- **In terms of this employment initiative, which is to develop pre-employment training programmes for the long-term unemployed, the council's finances would be targeted towards public sector development.**
- **Members should note that while part-funding (£10,000 per annum, for three years from the corporate workforce development budget) by the council may represent an opportunity for us to enhance our corporate social responsibility and take a leading role in the development of the pre-employment training programmes, it is not essential to our participation in the CEC public-sector programme.**
- **Should members have concerns in relation to the part funding the council will proceed with the programme on a non-funding basis, as previously agreed by committee.**

Resource Implications:

Financial

If it is agreed that a contribution of £10,000 is made, it is recommended that this funding should be given for one year only (i.e. £10,000 contribution for 2008/09) with funding for year two and three of the programme being dependant on successful evaluation of the first year of the programme and further agreement from committee in this regard.

Human Resource

There are no additional human resource implications contained within this report.

Asset and Other Implications

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

Decisions required:

Members are asked to note the information on the council's community outreach activities and decide whether or not the council should part fund the CEC's pre-employment training programme for the long-term unemployed as outlined above.

Key to Abbreviations

CECC	itywide Employability Consortium
ESF	European Social Fund
NBPB	North Belfast Partnership Board"

The Committee agreed that a contribution of £10,000 be made for one year only, that is, 2008/2009, with funding for years two and three of the programme being dependant on a successful evaluation of the first year of the programme.

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 members of staff who were related to existing officers of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointments.

Asset Management

Appropriation of Land at Shore Road Playing Fields

The Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 13th March, had agreed to the appropriation of approximately 0.84 acres of land at Shore Road Playing Fields to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to be managed as part of the Corporate Land Bank. The land was currently let on Licence to the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle and was used as an overflow car parking area. The current financial receipt from the Licence was £10,000 per annum. The site would now be managed by the Estates Management Unit, with an appropriate budgetary allocation to facilitate, among other things, any physical works to secure the site and the marketing of the site as required. A further report on the longer term utilisation of the site would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Noted.

Capital Programme: McCrory Park – Play Area and Associated Facilities

The Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 14th February, had acceded to a request to transfer an additional piece of land within the McCrory Park complex to facilitate landscaping and run-off areas as part of the development of a multi-user games and play area. At its meeting on 15th May, that Committee had been informed that the costs of the additional work would be required to be incorporated into the existing contract as a variation. Consequently, the contract sum would be increased from £293,000 to £380,029.60, which represented an increase of £87,029.60, an amount which would be funded fully by the Belfast Regeneration Office. The Committee had agreed to the variation of the contract sum, subject to the matter being reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, which was a requirement under the Council's financial regulations since the variation was more than 10% to the approved capital budget.

The Committee approved the variation of the contract sum.

Disposal of Land at Dundonald Cemetery

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

At its meeting on 14th February 2008 the Parks and Leisure Committee agreed to disposal of an area of land at Dundonald Cemetery to the Hanwood Trust and agreed in principle to the preparation of a legal agreement which would enable early commencement of work at the site prior to completion of a formal land transfer. The Committee also noted and supported the Hanwood Trust's requested to transfer the land at a notional cost subject to compliance with the Council's obligations to obtain the approval of the Department of the Environment to any disposal at less than best price (in accordance with Section 96 of the Local Government Act 1972). Approval was also subject to notification to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The land in question lies on the opposite side of the former Comber Railway line from the main portion of Dundonald Cemetery and lies within Castlereagh Borough Council local government area. The Belfast City Council land is required as part of an area required for development of a third generation pitch and associated run-off area. In the short term the land was required to accommodate soil shifting from other parts of the development taking place in the immediate vicinity.

The report to the Parks and Leisure Committee gave brief information on the proposed development which is being carried forward by the Hanwood Trust on behalf of Castlereagh Borough Council and information on the potential use of the developed facilities by residents from Belfast City Council area.

Key Issues

There are three main issues and several sub-ordinate issues associated with these:

1. The views of Committee are sought in relation to retrospective approval to the grant of a temporary Licence Agreement to the Hanwood Trust to allow storage of soil on approximately 0.43 acres of Belfast City Council lands. This land forms part of the lands referred to at '2' below.
 - The terms of this Licence to provide protection to the Council particularly in relation to provision of suitable indemnities and insurances plus compliance with all statutory requirements in relation to control of pollution and waste disposal.
 - Although Hanwood Trust are understood to have made considerable savings from use of the Council lands it has been requested by the Hanwood Trust, in view of the nature of the scheme, that the Licence should be granted at no financial cost to Hanwood Trust.
2. The views of Committee are sought in relation to disposal of the area of land.
 - Disposal is proposed by way of a 125 year lease (or such longer period as considered appropriate) to be prepared by the Director of Legal Services and subject to conditions which include protecting the Council's interests in relation to any future land contamination issues.

- Hanwood Trust have requested the land for nil consideration. In accordance with Section 96 of the Local Government Act 1972 the approval of the Department of the Environment is likely to be required if the Council proceed on this basis. On a pro rata basis, and based upon a valuation prepared for Castlereagh Borough Council by the District Valuer, to value of Belfast City Council's portion would be approximately £50,000 a further reference to the District Valuer would be require in order to verify the appropriateness of this level of value to the BCC lands.
3. The main funders of this project are Sport NI (formerly the NI Sports Council) who are making a capital contribution of £1M. It is understood that Sport NI may require Belfast City Council to enter into a Deed of Dedication in relation to the BCC (land) portion of the scheme. If such a requirement is to be proposed by Sport NI it would be aimed at ensuring continued use of the facility for its intended 'sports' use for the 21 year period covered by the Deed. While understanding this aim, officers will wish to ensure that Belfast City Council does not commit to provision of future financial support for a scheme which lies outside the city's local government boundary.

Resource Implications

Financial

It is envisaged that no expenditure (except for limited legal and valuation fees) would be required by Belfast City Council. However the release of these lands at nil cost on Licence and their subsequent disposal may represent something of a lost financial opportunity to Belfast City Council. For these reasons the approval of the Department of the Environment is required.

Human Resources

No additional human resources required.

Asset and Other Implications

The portion of land requested by Hanwood Trust forms part of a larger area of approximately 3.6 acres, in Belfast City Council ownership, which is located on the opposite side of the former Comber railway line from Dundonald Cemetery. None of this land is

used in connection with the cemetery and it is essentially a low lying area of scrubland. The southern boundary of the 3.6 acres adjoins the extended Dundonald Ice Bowl site and is believed held by Castlereagh Borough Council or their nominees.

Recommendations

Committee is recommended to accede to the requests from the Hanwood Trust for provision of the lands, subject to appropriate legal agreements to be prepared by the Director of Legal Services to encompass the safeguards as set out in this report and to approve reference of these matters to the Department of the Environment for approval as required. The Committee is further recommended to approve entering into a 21 year duration, Deed of Dedication with Sport NI such does not commit the Council to any future financial expenditure in respect of the Hanwood development.

Key to Abbreviations

BCC – Belfast City Council”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

City Hall Grounds Tours

(Mr. G. Wright, Head of Facilities Management, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th April, it had deferred consideration of a report in relation to the City Hall Grounds Tours Pilot Scheme to enable further information to be provided in relation to the appropriateness of the proposal – including the imposition of charges – whether such a scheme could be suitably managed and indeed its whole viability, the proposed script, staffing issues and the impact on private tour operators.

The Head of Facilities Management reported that a revised proposal had now been developed in light of the issues which had been raised by the Members. He pointed out that the original proposal had been based on using dedicated staff to provide a bespoke City Hall grounds tour product twice per day, five days per week. The revised proposal would take a different approach in so far as it would build on an existing relationship between the Council’s Development Department, the Belfast Visitor and Convention Centre and the blue-badge guides who delivered the existing Historic Belfast walking tour of the City.

It was now proposed that the existing Historic Belfast tour would be enhanced by including the script which had been prepared for the City Hall grounds and extending the tour by approximately thirty minutes in order to make the City Hall the centrepiece. The tour operated currently at 2.00 p.m. each Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday and was booked through the Belfast Visitor and Convention Centre at a cost of £6 per person, with no concessionary rates applied. The tours would be available from June till September, 2008 only and would be reviewed thereafter.

The Head of Facilities Management pointed out that the net cost of the Historic Belfast tour was already being met by the Tourism Development Unit and it would therefore only be the marginal cost of the blue-badge guides which would require to be funded by the Facilities Unit. Following discussions with the blue-badge guides, the additional cost had been estimated to be £1,870 in total, in contrast to the £8,500 costs of the original proposal. That amount could be funded from existing budgets and would not therefore be required to be passed onto tourists in increased tour prices. There might also be some modest additional costs to amend existing publicity material in order to promote the enhanced tour.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee approve the enhancement of the existing Historic Belfast tour by incorporating the City Hall Grounds script and points of interest and that the existing blue-badge guides be used to provide the tours as outlined for the period 1st June till 30th September, 2008, following which the matter would be reviewed.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Good Relations and Equality

(Mrs. 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 4th April.

Interfaces/Peace Walls

In response to a Member's question, the Chairman of the Good Relations Steering Panel (Councillor Long) informed the Committee that, although work on the initial data collection phase of the interfaces/peace walls project involved only statutory agencies, the Working Group which had been established for this purpose had already agreed that full consultation with local community groups, residents and community representatives living close to peace lines and interfaces would be essential in order to ensure the effectiveness of the project.

Noted.

Book of Honour

The Committee was reminded that several years previously Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Book of Honour, had proposed that each District Council in Northern Ireland should publish a book which recorded the names of those people from their Council area who had died in the Great War of 1914-1918. In August, 2004 the former Policy and Resources Committee had considered a report outlining that suggestion. The Committee had supported the proposal in principle but queried whether additional external funding could be secured for such a project.

In 2005, Sir Kenneth had informed the Council that the Ad Hoc Committee had been successful in obtaining a grant of £20,000 from the Ulster Garden Village Trust and had engaged Mr Derek Smyth, a retired history teacher, to undertake the necessary research and prepare a *Book of Honour* for Belfast, using the City Council district as a pilot area. Mr Smyth had made a presentation to the former Commemorations Working Group in February, 2006, referring to the books which had already been produced by Donegal and Newry and Mourne and outlining the various phases of his research. The Council had included an article on the project in the winter 2006 edition of the *City Matters* magazine in order to seek the public's assistance in the compilation of the list of people from Belfast who had given their lives during the Great War.

It was pointed out that the Belfast Book of Honour was almost complete and it was expected to be published in November, which would mark the 90th Anniversary of the ending of the First World War. The Ad Hoc Committee had had discussions with representatives of the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish News and the News Letter, who were keen to be involved with the project. Each newspaper would be prepared to contribute £5,000 towards the costs of producing the Book of Honour, on the understanding that the Council provided a sum of £5,000, which it was anticipated would cover the likely publication costs. The Ad Hoc Committee was planning to establish itself as a Company Limited by Guarantee and to pursue charitable status in order to make the best possible use of any profits which might be generated by the sale of the book.

The Good Relations Manger indicated that the book was an excellent example of a cross-community historical initiative which illustrated Belfast's shared history and which was funded by a combination of public and private finance. In addition, the proposal was in keeping with the aims of the Council's Good Relations Strategy. Accordingly, the Good Relations Steering Panel, at its meeting on 9th May, had agreed to request the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to provide funding in the sum of £5,000 towards the cost of the publication of the Belfast Book of Honour and to approve the provision of small scale hospitality at its launch.

The Committee approved the funding and the provision of hospitality.

Cross-Cutting Issues

IT Structure

(Ms. R. Crozier, Head of ISB, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee noted a report which provided an update on performance and the resilience of the Council's IT infrastructure. A copy of the report is set out hereunder:

“Relevant Background Information

At April's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee Elected Members raised the issue of performance and resilience of the Council's internet service. This was raised in the context of the Council's website development and the proposed addition of on-line transactions enabling the public to use Council services via the internet.

In the past two years ISB has worked with the Council's Audit, Governance and Risk services and undergone a series of risk assessments for business continuity and information security. Recommendations from these assessments have been incorporated into the business plan of the service and delivery monitored through periodic reviews of the risk registers.

This report outlines the current infrastructure in place and developments to assure performance. Access to internet is dealt with specifically at point 3 but it is important to note that all components of the infrastructure are important and each has an impact on the other.

Key Issues

The key issues in providing infrastructure services are:

1. Availability and accuracy of information
2. Internal network connectivity
3. External connectivity and information security.

As demand for internet services increases and the Council changes ways of working and ways of delivering services, it is critical that we have a robust infrastructure to support these needs.

The following points summarise the position in relation to infrastructure services.

1. Information Availability

The Council's PCs and servers are connected to the council's network enabling access to documents, email and information held on databases.

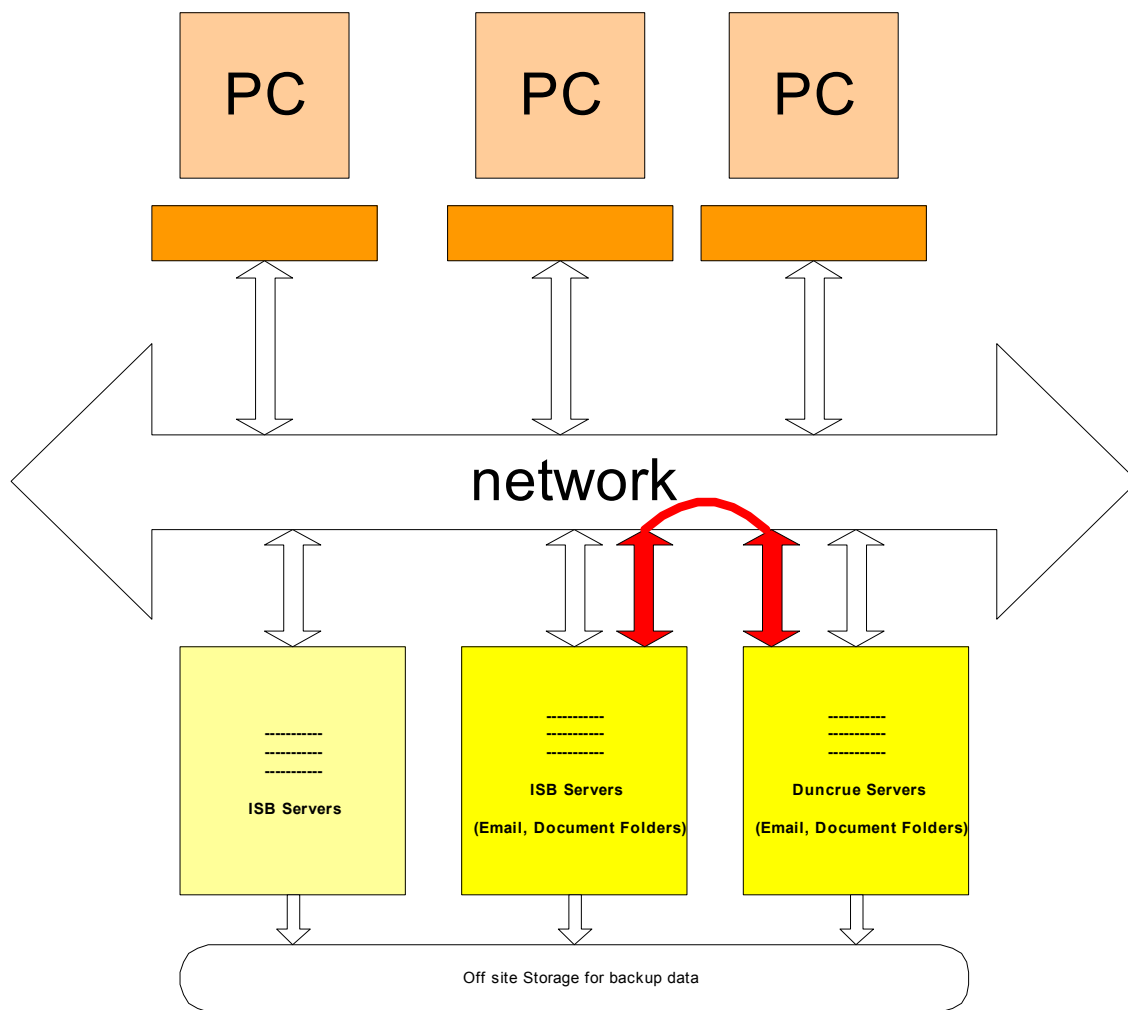


Fig.1

The above diagram show servers that hold information connected to the council network thus allowing access from PCs connected to the same council network. Access to the network is controlled by username and password.

Servers storing data

Most servers are hosted at ISB's site in Gloucester St, but servers that hold critical information to users such as documents and email are duplicated at the council's Duncrue Complex site. ISB commissioned a 2nd server room at Duncrue in 2007 and both rooms have their own emergency power supply, are secure, and have air-conditioning and fire protection systems. All data held on those servers in ISB deemed critical is automatically duplicated in real time at the 2nd site in Duncrue. These servers currently include those that store data for the following services:

- Documents in secure file shares,
- Email

There is currently an active project implementing data duplication for Financial systems.

All of the data on all servers is backed up every night onto magnetic tape, held temporarily at ISB in a fire-proof cabinet, and periodically moved to an off-site location.

Servers delivering data

Modern technology and industry best practice requires the separation of servers that store data, called data servers and servers that actually deliver that data to users, called application servers.

At present, the application servers that deliver documents and email services to users are duplicated at ISB and Duncrue. If there are problems with any of the servers in ISB, then their counterparts in Duncrue can be quickly brought into service. There is currently an active project implementing duplication of the financial systems application servers.

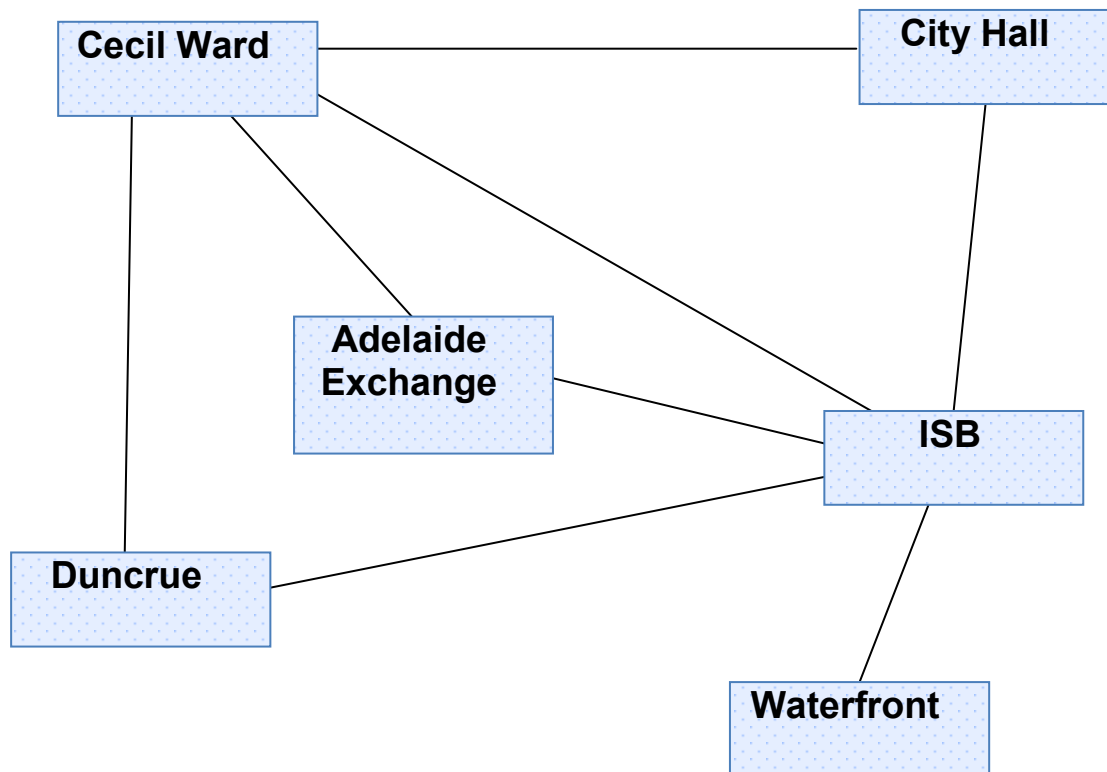
ISB are currently working with the Council's Audit, Governance and Risk service to ascertain what other duplication of application and data servers is required and the priority of work.

2. Network Resilience

Belfast City council staff are distributed across a number of sites around the city. The council network has been designed in order to provide connectivity between all sites in such a way as to be totally transparent to the user.

Fig.2

BCC Network Diagram showing links between main sites
N.B. ALL links are 100mb Fibre



Key sites are connected together using fibre-optic technology mainly provided by BT. All key sites' connections have a capacity in excess of that required by normal working activity and also any periodic peaks in activity.

In addition to this, redundant links are used as a contingent against the failure of a link or of equipment at a key site. In effect, all key sites are triangulated so that a failure of one link or site will not result in the loss of network services.

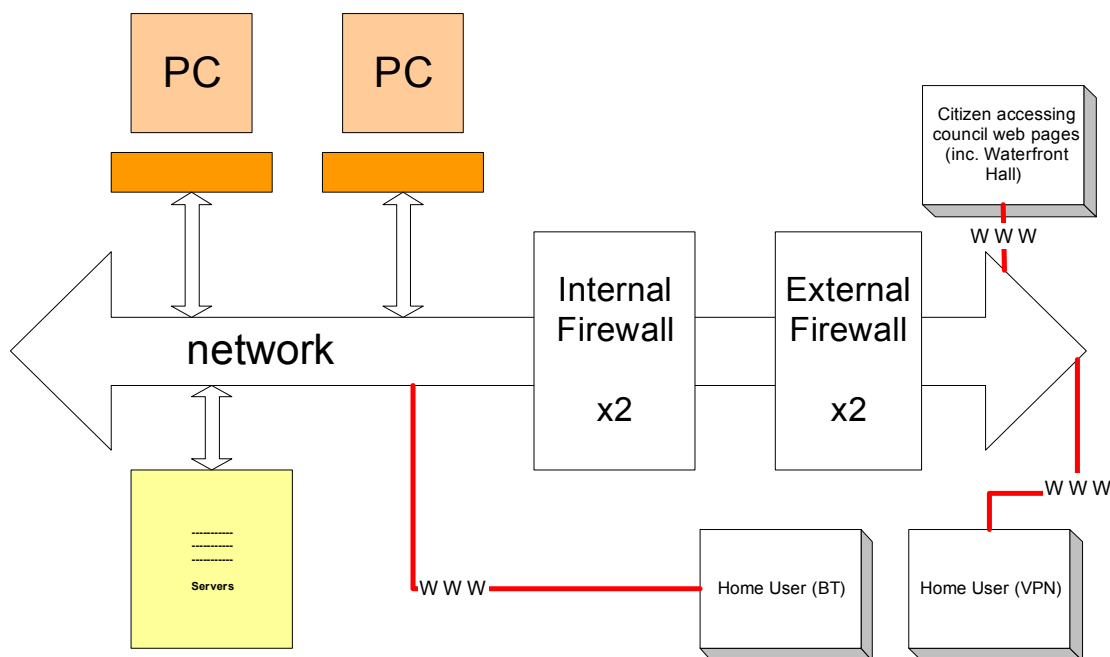
The diagram shows the links between the key council sites and also indicates that there are alternative routes available should any link or site become unavailable.

This design is under constant review and more links will be added to the network as required.

3. External connectivity

Users connected to the council's network may also use internet-based services such as email and web page browsing.

There is also a requirement for users to connect to the council's network from locations that are not part of the council estate (for example from home).



Any external connection to outside the council's network must be made secure against viruses, malware and other attacks. ISB have installed a secure and resilient web architecture that is shown above in simplified terms for clarity.

Entrance to the council network is granted only when authenticated as a council user and also by being granted access by a 2 layer firewall.

Each layer in the firewall is duplicated for resilience purposes; the 2nd firewall becoming active when the primary firewall fails for some reason.

The firewall at each layer is also of a complementary type of technology and built by different manufacturers as per industry best practice.

Home users with their own broadband connection can use the council's virtual private network (VPN) that is a fast, secure, encrypted connection via the internet from a PC outside the council network through the secure web connection (including the 2 layers of firewall) onto the council network.

Some other home users use an older method of connection called BT Central. This is a BT managed service that gives a secure encrypted connection via the internet and BT's own network from a PC outside the council network onto the council network. BT supplies a trusted connection onto our network and BT manages the security of that.

4. Infrastructure performance

Access to information and network resilience elements (points 1 and 2) of the Council's infrastructure are very robust because of the Council's investment over a number of years.

External connectivity (point 3) does have considerable capacity with contingency for failure built in. The web sites hosted by the council at the ISB site in Gloucester St. currently receive on average 50,000-80,000 hits per day. However the infrastructure is capable of handling much more than that. One example is the recent Billy Connolly concert ticket sales when the number of hits received that day was over 436,000.

It has been the case though in recent months where problems have occurred with the inner layer of the firewall. This piece of equipment is reaching the end of its life and has on occasions failed and the secondary firewall has failed to start operating in this instance. The result of this is that all network traffic to and from the internet is blocked – effectively blocking all web page access and emails to users connected to the council network either in council premises or at home.

ISB are currently selecting a replacement firewall. The timescale for implementing the new equipment is June 2008. In the meantime, ISB are operating an out of hours service where a telephone support service is manned 9:00am-9:00pm. If there is a problem with internet access ISB staff will correct the failure in the inner firewall which will restore internet and email access.

It is planned to continue this service even after the new firewall is in place and ISB are working with Business Improvement to introduce a more formal provision for staff out of hours cover in expectation of an increased demand for out of hours support for a growing number of services such as on-line transactional services.

ISB will bring forward periodic reports on infrastructure performance.

Planned improvements to the web infrastructure

ISB management are assessing the costs and benefits of having a 2nd connection to the internet (called a point of presence or POP) based at the 2nd server site at the Duncrue complex. The main reason for having a 2nd internet connection at Duncrue is to have a contingency for external access to the internet (and thus backup web page, email and VPN services) in the instance of the Gloucester St site being lost for any reason. While the prime reason for having a second POP is for providing greater resilience, it will also allow the spreading of web traffic across the 2 connections delivering greater performance and enabling the council's web sites to handle even greater volumes of traffic it currently experiences.

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

Note the contents of the report."

Chairman