

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 19th September, 2008

## MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor D. Dodds (Chairman); and  
Councillors Adamson, Attwood, M. Browne, W. Browne,  
Convery, Kirkpatrick, Lavery, Long, Maginness,  
C. Maskey, McCann, Smyth and Stoker.

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

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Crozier and Newton.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st September, subject to:

- (i) the amendment of the minute under the heading "August, 2008 Flooding Update" to provide that the Council seek explanations from the Department for Regional Development regarding maintenance issues around the drainage in the Hillsborough Drive area and many similar areas across the City and that assurances be sought from the Department that a high-level maintenance regime will be introduced and adhered to across the City; and
- (ii) the omission of the minute under the heading "Minutes of Meeting of Audit Panel – Staff Policy" which, at the request of Councillor Rodway, was taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

### Staff Travel Policy

(Mrs. H. Loudon, Head of Financial Services, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 22nd August under the heading "Staff Travel Policy". A copy of the minute in that regard is set out hereunder:

*"The Panel considered the undernoted report:*

**'Relevant Background Information**

*A report was tabled at the 11 March 2008 meeting of the Audit Panel advising Members that a taskforce group had been established to Review the Approval and Control Processes and Travel Policy with the following objectives:*

**Objectives**

- 1. To review current approval and control processes and the travel policy*
- 2. To identify improvements to both processes and policy which matches the new financial systems, takes account of the human resources strategy and workforce development plan's needs and which provides for continuous improvement*
- 3. To ensure that the new processes enable improved access to information which enables improved on-going scrutiny of value for money and greater accountability, both internally and externally.*

*A progress report was tabled at a meeting of the Audit Panel on 13 May 2008. The Audit Panel requested that the proposed policy be tabled for approval at this meeting.*

**Current Position**

*Members of the Audit Panel will be aware that Belfast is by far the largest Council in Northern Ireland. In order to provide quality, value for money services to the ratepayers of the city employees need to have their knowledge and skills developed to help build organisational capacity. Training and developing staff is also important in motivating employees and in retaining their knowledge and skills in the organisation.*

*Included within the Council's workforce development plan are the key themes of leadership development, skills development and organisational development. These reflect the key workforce development themes at a national level.*

*Frequently employees need to look outside Northern Ireland to access these improved skills and knowledge. This is done by going on study visits to similar sized Councils in Great Britain, attending training courses, conferences and seminars which are not available in Northern Ireland. These new skills and knowledge can be transferred to other employees in the Council which may reduce the need for other staff to attend an event.*

*Employees also travel outside Northern Ireland to promote the city as an excellent place to invest in and to attract tourism. There is evidence to support the substantial economic returns for the city in engaging in this type of activity.*

*The Council has successfully attracted in excess of £8million in European funding to support a number of initiatives which would not otherwise benefited the city. It is mandatory in most European funded projects to attend meetings in Europe and to have European partners to compliment the work of an initiative. The travel costs to Europe and the cost of any employees attached to a project are partly funded by the programme.*

*There is a risk associated with being too restrictive with staff travel with employees not attending relevant conferences, study visits, etc with the result that "best practice" knowledge and new skills are lost to the Council with the associated risk of ratepayers not receiving innovative quality services.*

*The Council currently has an authorisation process for staff attending events and many services also require employees to detail a business case to support their application and a post evaluation report on completion of the event. These procedures were examined and good practice identified for inclusion in the proposed draft Policy for Staff Attending Events, which is attached.*

*In summary it has addressed the following issues:*

- 1. The scope covered by the policy, including what is excluded from the policy.*
- 2. The principles that must be adhered to for employees attending events. This includes a mandatory business case to support an application and a post evaluation of the benefits.*
- 3. The arrangement for travel which are set out in a Travel Protocol.*
- 4. The need to capture multiple invitations to conferences, seminars, etc which are routinely received by the Council.*
- 5. The approval process and the signing off by senior management.*
- 6. The arrangements for the payment of subsistence.*

7. *The annual publication of staff attendance at events and a policy detailing what will be included.*
8. *The reporting arrangements to the Audit Panel and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and to the Chief Officers Management Team.*

**Resource Implications**

*None in the context of this report.*

**Recommendation**

*The Audit Panel is requested to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the Policy for Staff Attending Events and the associated appendices.*

**Key to Abbreviations**

*None*

**Documents Attached**

*Draft Policy for Staff Attending Events and associated appendices.*

**DRAFT POLICY FOR STAFF ATTENDING EVENTS**

*Belfast City Council employees will, from time to time, need to attend events such as training courses, conferences, study visits, etc., in order to discharge their duties. This could result in an employee being absent from normal working and may involve travel and other costs.*

*We have developed this policy to support the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Accounting Manual relating to employees attending events. It has been developed to ensure that approval and control processes are robust and that attendance at such events provides value for money for the rate payers of Belfast.*

**1.1 Scope**

*This approval and control process is for all events which senior management have to approve and addresses the need to ensure consistency between types of events covered in this policy with the categories of events specified on the application form. This will include attendance at:-*

- *Conferences as a speaker representing the Council or a delegate.*
- *Study visits.*

- *Personal/professional development events (excluding part-time study)*
- *Service and operational visits*
- *Research, study and best practice visits*
- *Promotion of the City events and Trade Fairs*
- *Best in Class award ceremonies*
- *Meetings of professional bodies and groups where payments are paid by BCC even where it is refunded partly or in full by the body to the Council.*
- *Other bodies with which the Council is undertaking work and is directly chargeable by the Council to the customer.*

**Exclusions from this process are:-**

- *Business development days (away days) as they will be subject to a separate policy and application form.*
- *Attendance at residential courses as part of a part-time study course which will be approved through the part time study application process.*
- *Attendance at meetings of professional bodies and groups where the full attendance cost is paid directly by the body concerned or reimbursed directly to the attendee. Approval to attend such events must be requested as a business absence for employees who use the clockwise system.*
- *Attendance at conferences/courses/study visits and meetings which have no cost to the Council. Approval to attend such events must be requested as a business absence for employees who use the clockwise system.*
- *Attendance at a corporate meeting or training course organised by another Council Department. (If there is a charge from an external source e.g. venue, speaker, etc then a purchase order must be raised through the SAP system in advance of the event).*

**2.0 Principles**

- 2.1** *Attendance at all events must be supported by a business case detailing the benefits to the employee, to the Council and in providing services to the public.*
- 2.2** *A post evaluation form for every event must be completed.*

- 2.3 *Attendance at events will normally be by one person. If more than one person is attending this must also be justified in the business case.*
- 2.4 *If an employee is attending an event as a speaker representing the Council any fee earned must be repaid to the Council. If payment is in the form of a gift the Gifts/Hospitality Policy must be complied with. Any potential conflict of interest must be registered.*
- 2.5 *Personal development/professional development events must be linked to the employee's job and will normally be part of the employees Personal Development Plan (PDP) and/or a professional body's requirement for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). An employee who is a member of professional body which has CPD requirements must ensure that these are incorporated into his/her PDP.*
- 2.6 *Attendance at award ceremonies must be restricted to three employees. In instances where more than one project is shortlisted in the same award scheme and more than three employees are required to attend the Director of Corporate Services will exercise discretion in deciding if sending additional employees is appropriate.*
- 2.7 *Any event which is also to be attended by a Councillor must have Committee approval prior to the event.*
- 3.0 **Travel Arrangements**
- 3.1 *Travel to an event must conform with the current Travel Protocol which can be found at Appendix 1.*
- 4.0 **Capture of Multiple Invitations to Events**
- 4.1 *Multiple invitations to conferences, seminars, etc., are received within the Council regularly.*
- 4.2 *A Protocol will be developed to set out how the Council will deal with this issue.*
- 5.0 **Approval Process**
- 5.1 *All attendances at events, including those approved by Committee, must be approved in advance of the event by the Head of Service (or appropriate senior manager), or their nominee and the Chief Officer (or nominee).*

- 5.2 *All requests to attend events must be accompanied by a business case detailing the benefits to the employee, the Council and in providing services to the public.*
- 5.3 *Where there are multiple requests to attend an event Heads of Service (or appropriate senior manager), or their nominee, and Chief Officers (or nominee) must satisfy themselves that a sound business case exists to approve the attendance of more than one person.*
- 5.4 *A post event evaluation form must be completed for each event and signed off by the senior manager who approved the attendance at the event.*
- 5.5 *The Director of Corporate Services will approve attendances for Chief Officers for events held within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.*
- 5.6 *The Chief Executive will sign the approval form for attendances by Chief Officers for events held outside the United Kingdom and Ireland.*
- 5.7 *The Director of Corporate Services will sign the approval form for all events to be attended by the Chief Executive*
- 5.8 *Financial Services will be responsible for maintaining the data base for all requests for attending events, in monitoring compliance with the policy and in providing information to assist in corporate management.*
- 6.0 **Subsistence**
- 6.1 *Subsistence is payable on eligible expenditure incurred in the course of attending events on behalf of the Council. Details on the arrangements for payments are covered in Appendix 3.*
- 7.0 **Publication**
- 7.1 *Information on events attended by staff will be published on an annual basis by 30 June of each year under the Council's Publication Scheme. The first year of publication will relate to events attended during 2008/9 i.e. the first date for publication will be 30 June 2009.*

7.2 *A policy detailing the arrangements for the publication of information is attached at Appendix 4.*

8.0 **Reporting Arrangements**

8.1 *COMT will receive an analysis report on the information held in the database every three months.*

8.2 *A quarterly report will be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee via the Audit Panel.*

9.0 **Guidelines**

9.1 *The application of this Policy is supported by Guidelines.*

10.00 **Effective Date**

10.1 *The effective date of this policy is 1 October 2008.*

**APPENDIX 1**

**Draft Travel Protocol for Employees**

*Belfast City Council employees will, from time to time, need to travel to attend events in order to carry out Council business. As a consequence they may have to travel away from Council locations.*

*This travel protocol has been developed to support the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Accounting Manual regarding staff travel in relation to attending events. It has been developed to ensure that arrangements for travel are robust and consistent across the Council and that the cost of travel provides value for money for Belfast rate payers.*

1.0 **Scope**

- *This protocol applies to all employees of Belfast City Council. The travel protocol for Members' is covered by Regulations made by the government.*
- *It applies to travel relating to events as specified in the Policy for Staff Attending Events.*
- *It does NOT apply to travel which is part of normal day-to-day operational work e.g. from the place of work to carry out maintenance, inspections, etc.*
- *It does NOT apply to travel from the employee's home to their place of work.*



**2.0 Principles**

- 2.1 *Approval for travel to attend events will be through the revised application form. This approval process includes permission to travel on Council business as detailed on the revised application form. Details on how to seek such approvals are in the Policy for Staff Attending Events and in the guidelines for completion of the revised application form.***
- 2.2 *Approval to attend an event with the associated travel must be completed in advance of the event.***
- 2.3 *In certain instances approval by Committee is needed. This must also be obtained in advance.***
- 2.4 *Employees must use the most economical method of travel considering the cost of travel, journey start and end times, subsistence costs, potential savings in officer time and the business needs.***
- 2.5 *Account must be taken of the particular needs which may arise from an employee's medical condition. Management should obtain advice on this from the Council's Occupational Health Service.***
- 2.6 *When employees are travelling with Members to the same event the travel class, etc., for the employee and Member will be the same.***
- 2.7 *Employees must not gain any personal and private advantage from business travel. Any rewards for example points, vouchers, air miles, free travel, etc., should be used solely against future business travel wherever possible and not for private use.***
- 2.8 *Travel and accommodation should be booked and paid for directly by the Council in most instances. The exception to this is when these costs are paid directly by an outside body.***
- 2.9 *The payment of overtime or time off in lieu must comply with the relevant Council's policy and guideline on such matters.***
- 2.10 *All travel should reflect the Council's Policy on Environmental Responsibility.***
- 2.11 *When travel arrangements do not meet this protocol the Director of Corporate Services must be consulted in advance of arrangements being made so that approval may be given.***

**3.0 The Council's Travel Contract**

**3.1 *The Council's travel contract should be used to book travel and accommodation. The cost effectiveness of other options may be considered if there is a clear business case for making savings. Booking with Council's contracted travel agent provides assistance and support that non-contract options do not provide and this should be considered as part of the overall cost. Consideration must be given to the total cost which includes the cost of an employee's time in sourcing suitable carriers and hotels.***

**4.0 Travelling by Air**

**4.1 *The most economical level of ticket must be booked, taking into consideration the requirement of principles 2.4 and 2.5 above.***

**4.2 *Tickets booked must not allow for more than two changes. It may be more cost effective to re-purchase a second ticket rather than allow for time changes when booking. For example it may be cheaper to book with a budget airline and have to re-purchase a ticket than to book a flexible ticket through another airline.***

**4.3 *The lowest available class of ticket must be booked.***

**4.4 *Where an outward long-haul flight (for example in excess of 3 hours flying time) is needed and employees are expected to start working within a few hours of arrival a return business class (or equivalent) ticket may be booked.***

**4.5 *Business lounge access may be purchased if available when there is a "stopover" of more than one hour and the class of travel booked does not include access to an airport business lounge. The Council's contracted travel agency can advise on this.***

**5.0 Travelling by Sea**

**5.1 *Travel by sea and onward by road or rail as opposed to air travel is only an option where the total cost provides a low-cost alternative or where medical opinion requires it. The total cost including the cost of travel, hotel costs, subsistence costs, and mileage, must be taken into account when assessing this option. Consideration must also be given to the potential savings in officer time and the business needs.***

- 5.2 *Where available boat reserved seating may be booked. Employees travelling overnight are entitled to book an overnight cabin which must be on a “single occupancy” basis.*
- 6.0 **Travelling by Land**
- 6.1 *The most appropriate method of travelling by land must be used taking into consideration the overall cost, potential savings in employee time and the business case.*
- 6.2 *An employee’s own private car may be used if it provides a low cost option. Motor mileage will be claimed under the Council’s arrangements for subsistence. An allowance is paid if an employee carries colleagues on business. This may be significantly cheaper than public transport or hire car charges.*
- 6.3 *A vehicle may be hired provided it is a value for money alternative. This may be appropriate if a number of employees are travelling together or where public transport is unavailable.*
- 6.4 *Rail travel must be at standard class unless the journey is greater than 2 hours. A first class ticket may be booked where employees are expected to start work on arrival or to work during the journey.*
- 6.5 *Where available rail reserved seating may be booked. Employees travelling overnight are entitled to book an overnight cabin which must be on a “single occupancy” basis.*
- 6.6 *Travel by Heathrow Express must be at standard class and only undertaken where it is the most appropriate means of travel considering cost, potential savings in employee time and the business case.*
- 6.7 *Employees are permitted to use a taxi for short journeys within towns and cities for example from hotels to conference venues or airports. They may also use taxis for longer journeys where no suitable public transport service is available. These costs are claimed retrospectively through the Council’s subsistence arrangements.*

**7.0 Overnight Stays**

**7.1 *Employees may travel to an event the previous evening when an event starts early in the working day or the employee anticipates that travel time or risk of delay would result in their arriving late for the start of the event, and if this reduces the value of attending the event to the employee and the Council.***

**7.2 *Employees are responsible for settling all accounts for incidental costs before leaving the accommodation. The Council will only meet the cost of the accommodation and any meals previously ordered from the accommodation supplier through the purchasing process.***

**8.0 Extending Stays Beyond an Event**

**8.1 *Employees are permitted to extend their stay beyond an event, either before or after. For absences during the working week this must be approved in advance by their line manager and in line with normal leave procedures.***

**8.2 *If the travel cost for the extended stay is greater than it would have been if the employee had returned at the end of the event then the employee will reimburse the Council for the additional cost (or pay for the additional cost directly to the carrier). If the travel cost is less for the extended stay the employee will not benefit from the lower cost.***

**8.3 *Any additional accommodation costs will be borne by the employee.***

**8.4 *Any other additional costs, for example additional car parking charges, will be paid by the employee.***

**9.0 Travelling with Partners**

**9.1 *A partner may accompany an employee provided they do not compromise the employee in carrying out Council business.***

**9.2 *The employee will be responsible for all additional costs associated with the partner's attendance. Evidence must be provided to the relevant business support staff that these additional costs have been paid. Ideally this should be prior to the commencement of the travel.***

9.3 *The approval of a senior manager must be obtained in advance of an employee arranging to be accompanied by a partner.*

10.0 **Subsistence**

10.1 *Subsistence is payable in arrears on eligible expenditure incurred in the course of attending events on behalf of the Council*

10.2 *In certain circumstances advance subsistence may be made available.*

10.3 *Details for the arrangements for all subsistence, including what is eligible, are covered in the Council's Subsistence Guidelines.*

11.0 **Insurance**

11.1 *Where an employee's own vehicle is to be used it is the employee's responsibility to make sure that there is a proper level of insurance. The Council will not meet any additional costs for insurance. Whilst the employee will wish to consult their own insurer general advice may be sought from the Council's Insurance Unit.*

11.2 *Whilst there is no need for employees to advise the Insurance Unit in advance of individual trips, anyone who has an existing medical condition and who intends to travel on Council business should advise the Insurance Unit. This information will be treated confidentially. Any employee intending to engage in dangerous sports as part of the official visit must inform the Insurance Unit in advance of the visit.*

11.3 *Details of the insurance cover provided to Council employees travelling on Council business is attached at Appendix A. This will be updated annually to employees on renewal of the insurance policy.*

12.0 **Miscellaneous**

12.1 *The cost of car parking at airports or stations can be recouped from the Council under the subsistence arrangements. Employees must minimise costs by using the most cost effective option available.*

- 12.2 *Employees are personally responsible for ensuring that their passport and any visa requirements are up to date to enable them to travel.*
- 12.3 *An employee who is refused permission to travel by a carrier, for whatever reason including invalid or missing documentation, will repay all costs arising to the Council.*
- 12.4 *Employees travelling outside the United Kingdom are responsible for exchanging sterling to the required foreign currency. The Council will meet the cost of one exchange transaction from sterling to another currency and one exchange back to sterling for the same visit. The value of the amount exchanged will not exceed the total amount of subsistence to which the employee would be eligible for the visit. Where the official business involves time in more than one foreign country (other than onward travel time) the Council will meet the exchange costs for each currency on the same basis.*
- 12.5 *The Council will not meet the cost of repairing a mechanical breakdown and/or vehicle recovery for an employee's own vehicle.*
- 12.6 *Any compensation offered by a carrier to an employee, for example, for delayed travel or over-booking, must be declared to their Department on return. Where the compensation involves a monetary payment or future concession on travel these must be paid over to the Council in full as they arise solely from the employee's official work. The employee will be eligible to recoup subsistence costs for the period of any delay in the normal manner.*
- 13.0 **Effective Date**
- 13.1 *This protocol will be effective from 1 October 2008.*

## APPENDIX 2

### **Travel Insurance**

*All Council employees and Councillors are covered under the Council's Group Travel Insurance Policy in respect of official Council business and conferences.*

*The policy covers matters such as:*

- *Loss of baggage and personal items.*
- *Medical costs for treatment outside the UK.*

- *Cancellation costs if the person cannot travel due to illness, death of close relatives or other unforeseen circumstances.*
- *Personal liability insurance.*
- *Personal accident cover*

*The insurance applies in respect of trips outside of the Northern Ireland for visits worldwide.*

#### **Emergency Contact Information**

*Assistance is available in the event of a medical or other emergency whilst visiting another country from AIG Lifeline Plus. The telephone number is given on the insurer's emergency travel assistance card which is available from the Insurance Unit. It is strongly recommended that a card or copy of it is issued to each person travelling on Council business.*

*The policy number is 00158 11055 and this must be inserted on the card to validate it.*

*The travel insurance policy does not provide cover for:-*

- *Personal valuables such as jewellery and watches and personal money which should be insured by the member of staff under household insurance.*
- *Hazardous sports activities such as skiing, mountaineering, parachuting etc.*
- *Vehicle insurance for vehicles hired or borrowed.*

#### **Claims**

*In the event of a loss it is important that certain information is obtained by the person travelling to enable a claim to be made at a later stage. If baggage has been lost a report should be obtained from the carrier stating that the baggage has been lost or delayed. If flights have been delayed necessitating overnight accommodation please retain any receipts for emergency expenses and obtain a report from the carrier that the flight has been delayed.*

*For further information please contact – David Smith (Insurance Officer)*

*Financial Services Section  
Adelaide Exchange  
24 Adelaide Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8GD  
DDI 028 9027 0517 or Ext 6111  
smithd@belfastcity.gov.uk*

**APPENDIX 3**

**Draft Subsistence Arrangements**

*Belfast City Council employees will, from time to time, need to travel to attend events in order to carry out Council business. As a consequence they may travel and incur expenses which are recoverable under our subsistence rules.*

*These subsistence guidelines have been developed to support the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Accounting Manual. They have been drafted to ensure that claims and payments for subsistence are consistent across the Council.*

**2.0 Scope**

- *These arrangements apply to all employees of Belfast City Council. The subsistence arrangements for Members' are covered by Regulations made by the government.*
- *They apply to food, beverages and incidental expenses which an employee incurs because of attending events as specified in the Policy for Staff Attending Events.*
- *It will also include reimbursement for travel and accommodation incurred directly by the employee. Payment of travel and accommodation will normally be booked and paid for by the Council in advance.*

**2.0 Principles**

- 2.1** *A full completed application form must be approved prior to attending the event. The Central Transaction Unit (CTU) must be in receipt of the form to enable subsistence to be paid.*
- 2.2** *Subsistence will be paid in arrears for events attended within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Advance subsistence will only be paid in exceptional circumstances.*
- 2.3** *Advance subsistence may be requested for events attended outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.*



- 2.4 *Subsistence should be claimed within two weeks of an event. Claims submitted more than three months after an event may not be paid.*
- 2.5 *Advance subsistence should be reconciled within two weeks of an event. Any money unspent should be refunded to the Council no later than two weeks after the event.*
- 2.6 *All claims for reimbursement must be accompanied by valid receipts and claimed on the Council's claim form.*
- 2.7 *Claims without receipts should rarely happen. Expenditure incurred where no receipt is available should be claimed using the "Lost or Unobtainable Receipt Voucher".*
- 2.8 *Subsistence should not be claimed for any meals booked by the Council, for example breakfast, nor should they be claimed if meal(s) are provided by the organisers of the event. If an employee is taking guests for a meal they need to complete a Small Scale Hospitality Form.*
- 2.9 *All claims for subsistence (advanced and retrospective reimbursement) must be made on the appropriate Council form and signed by the appropriate officer. (Currently E7/T2 which is being redrafted to simplify the claim and to improve processing.)*
- 2.10 *The maximum level of subsistence which can be claimed are reviewed annually and issued to all Departments by circular.*
- 2.11 *Claims for expenses outside these guidelines must be referred to the Director of Corporate Services so that approval may be given.*
- 2.12 *The Director of Corporate Services will sign the subsistence claim forms for the Chief Executive and Directors.*
- 2.13 *The Chief Executive will sign the subsistence claim form for the Director of Corporate Services.*

### 3.0 Eligible Expenditure

*The following additional expenditure is eligible for reimbursement*

- *Fares paid for taxis, bus, tram, underground, metro, etc.*
- *Publications for Departmental use for example maps, guides, books.*
- *Photographic equipment for Departmental use for example memory cards, films, developing costs.*
- *Laundry and dry cleaning for trips lasting five days or more*
- *One personal phone call home per day of a reasonable length.*
- *All work related phone calls.*
- *The cost of stationery, fax, email, photocopying, internet usage, etc., which is work related.*
- *Parking at airports.*
- *Any other incidental cost which is directly related to the nature of the visit and the appropriate to the employee's job.*

#### APPENDIX 4

### Policy on Publication of Information Relating to Employee Travel

*To demonstrate the Council's commitment to accountability and openness, and following consultation with the trade unions, we intend to publish annually information on payments made to, and on behalf of, employees in connection with expenditure incurred on travel on official business which is outside of day-to-day operational duties.*

*The information will be published within three months of the end of the preceding financial year. Before publication, employees will have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the information being published with their Department.*

*The published information will show each event and activity an employee attended and will include details of the:*

- *Employee's job title*
- *Employee's Council Department*
- *Employee's staff number*
- *Date(s) of the event or activity*
- *City/town and country in which the event or activity took place*

- *Description of the event or activity (for example conference name)*
- *Category of the event or activity (categories to be defined by the organisation)*
- *Amount paid on travel*
- *Amount paid on mileage*
- *Amount paid on accommodation*
- *Amount paid on subsistence*
- *Amount paid on fees (for example conference fees)*
- *Total of any miscellaneous costs*
- *Total cost in respect of an employee's participation in that particular event or activity*

*This policy will be applied from 1 April 2008 and be reviewed annually by the Records Management Unit and, if appropriate, be amended by the Chief Officers' Management Team to reflect best practice.'*

*The Head of Financial Services drew the Members' attention to various aspects of the proposed Policy and answered questions regarding it. She informed the Panel that a further Freedom of Information request had been received requesting information regarding travel which had been undertaken by Members and staff during the financial year 2007/2008 and that this information was currently being compiled. She informed the Panel further that six months after the Policy had been introduced the Audit, Governance and Risk Section would undertake an audit to ascertain how the new Policy was being complied with.*

*During discussion in the matter, the following points were made:*

- (i) no information had been provided regarding the number of occasions staff had travelled with Members to events and the associated costs;*
- (ii) it would be more beneficial if reports were submitted on a quarterly basis to the Committee responsible for the Departmental staff who had undertaken the travel, rather than the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee;*
- (iii) the report made no reference of any intention to reduce the costs associated with staff travel;*
- (iv) the Policy should be amended to enable staff to recoup the costs associated with using ATM machines when abroad;*
- (v) information regarding the length of the event being attended should be included in the information to be published;*

- (vi) *where possible personal development courses should be undertaken in Northern Ireland; and*
- (vii) *where a member of staff was addressing a conference, who paid for the associated travel and accommodation costs and what approval processes were required to enable the employee to attend the conference.*

*In response to the above comments, the Head of Financial Services indicated that she would provide the Panel with information regarding the number of occasions staff had accompanied Councillors on trips and the costs associated therewith. She pointed out that when employees were addressing a conference they were required to submit the T1 travel form and that most personal development courses attended by staff were held within Northern Ireland.*

*Following further discussion, the Panel:*

- (i) *indicated that it wished the costs associated with staff travel to be reduced;*
- (ii) *agreed that reports on staff travel be submitted on a quarterly basis to the relevant Committee and the Audit Panel;*
- (iii) *agreed that the information contained within Appendix 4 include the duration of the event being attended;*
- (iv) *agreed that the Policy be amended to enable staff to recoup the charges incurred when ATM machines were used abroad; and*
- (v) *recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the Staff Travel Policy as amended and the associated Appendices.*

*After discussion, during which the Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Financial Services answered a number of questions in relation to the application of the policy, the approval process for attending conferences and seminars and when Committee approval was required, the Committee adopted the recommendation of the Audit Panel.”*

Councillor Rodway, at whose request the minute had been taken back to the Committee, drew the Members' attention to points 4.4 and 4.5, which referred to the purchase in certain circumstances of business class air travel and the use of airport business lounges. He suggested that these were matters which should more appropriately be subject to the approval of the relevant Committee.

The Committee agreed to the foregoing amendment being made and approved the revised Staff Travel Policy.

## Modernisation and Improvement

### Review of Public Administration - Update

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

#### **1.0 “Relevant Background Information**

**1.1** The Review of Public Administration concluded on 13th March 2008 when the then Minister, Arlene Foster MLA announced the final recommendations with regard to local government reform in 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 the RPA is rapidly approaching a critical stage in its implementation whereby consideration is being given to the exact nature of the functions (and the resources that support them) which will be transferred from central to local government. There are a number of issues which Members should be made aware of in terms of the RPA process moving forward.

#### **2.2 Critical Path**

**2.2.1** It is important to recognise that the key driver for the RPA process over the next 6 months will be the need to meet the 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 appointed - July 2008
- Instructions to legislative Counsel – August 2008
- Report of Boundaries Commissioner - June 2009
- Local Government Miscellaneous Bill – Mid 2009
- Establishment of Statutory Transitional Committees
- Report of District Electoral Area Commissioner - July 2010
- Local Government Legislative Bill in place - January 2011
- Local Government Elections - May 2011

### **2.3 Delivery Structures – SLB and Policy Development Panels**

**2.3.1** In terms of delivery structures, the Department of Environment has established a two-tier model consisting of a Strategic Leadership Board and three Policy Development Panels (PDP's). The Strategic Leadership Board should fulfil the role of Council by providing overall direction to the process and the Policy Development Panels should fulfil the role of Council Committees.

**2.3.2** Each of the PDPs has met at least once and they have started to identify the key areas of work which need to be taken forward. The scope of the issues to be addressed by each of the three PDPs is extensive. Furthermore, many of the issues are cross-cutting and impact upon each other.

**2.3.4** The current membership of the PDPs and the officer support is allocated from both local government generally and Belfast City Council specifically.

**2.3.5** A series of task and finish officer working groups will be established to drive forward key strands of work attached to each PDP and the Council has put forward officer nominations for these working groups.

### **2.4 Developing a Change Programme for Local Government Reform**

**2.4.1** There are a number of strands of work currently underway which seeks to provide greater clarity on the necessary process for the effective implementation of the RPA including the development of a detailed programme of work, the articulation of appropriate delivery structures and, importantly, how its delivery could be resourced.

**2.4.2** This section of the report will provide Members with an update on the ongoing work of both PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte with regard to developing papers on the implementation of the RPA and the development of a local government modernisation programme.

#### **PriceWaterhouseCoopers: 'Practical Approach to the Implementation of Successful Change Programme in Local Government'**

**2.4.3** **▪** PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) had been commissioned by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) to prepare guidance on a practical approach to managing the RPA change process.

- The key recommendation emerging from the PWC suggests that an evolutionary approach to change should be adopted. This is outlined as Option 3 in the PWC report. This approach suggests that the greatest focus and effort should be given to the restructuring/transitional issues associate with the implementation of the RPA. It also suggests that depending upon the capacity and resources of individual Councils, consideration should be given to the transfer of functions and modernisation prior to 2011 may also include a transfer of functions and modernization prior to 2011.
- The purpose of this proposal is to ensure that there is no one size fits all solution and those Councils which may have greater capacity (e.g. Belfast) have the ability to agree with Departments' transitional programmes around the transfer of functions and the potential for taking forward pilot initiatives around key issues such as community planning.
- The report indicated that there might be a number of waves involved in the transfer of functions and pilots. The PWC paper also sets out the programme governance framework and the resources necessary to support the implementation of the RPA.
- Members will note that the PWC paper separates policy formulation and delivery. Policy formulation is to be primarily carried out by the Policy Development Panels but with implementation and delivery being the responsibility of Council Transition Management Teams of officers supported by a Regional Implementation Group (RIG). It is proposed that RIG be chaired by Paul Simpson, the Deputy Secretary of the DOE, and would include senior officials from Departments who are transferring functions, the 3 local government Chief Executive advisers to RPA Strategic Leadership Board, and a number of other key officials as required from the Local Government Staff Commission, NILGA etc.
- The purpose of RIG is to commission detailed pieces of work and provide detailed guidance to the Transition Management Teams and the RPA Strategic Leadership Board.

- PWC had estimated that 42 people would initially be required (full-time) to support the Transition Management Teams and Regional Implementation Group with an estimated cost between £4-£8m. At this stage, there is no clarity given as to how this resource would be sourced and financed.

**Deloitte' 'Strategic Outline Business Case for Local Government Modernisation'**

- 2.4.4
- Deloitte had been commissioned by the DoE to prepare an outline business case for a Local Government Modernisation Programme and examine the projected costs for its implementation which has been estimated to be in the region of £54million. Total monetary benefits are estimated to be £15million per annum, once steady state has been achieved.
  - Deloitte has been commissioned also by the Department to develop a further Strategic Outline Case for re-configuration work in Councils which is to be submitted to the Department of Finance & Personnel for the September monitoring round.

2.5 **'Statement of Principles' to underpin the transfer of functions**

- 2.5.1 It is proposed that the 'Statement of Principles' developed by NILGA, and supported by officials from Belfast City Council, should underpin the transfer of functions from central to local government.

2.6 **Appointment of Local Government Boundary Commissioner**

- 2.6.1 On 1st July, 2008 the Minister of Environment, Sammy Wilson MP, MLA appointed Dick McKenzie as the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland with responsibility for making recommendations on the designation of boundaries and names of the eleven new district Councils and the number, boundaries and names of their constituent wards.
- 2.6.2 The provisional recommendations will be released in September and a series of public hearing will be scheduled in each of the 11 district areas to enable people to comment on the proposals. It is anticipated that the final recommendations report will be released by 30th June 2009.



## **2.7 Transitional Arrangements**

**2.7.1 A letter has been issued to all Councils from the Minister of the Environment, dated 15th June, requesting that Councils begin to co-operate on local convergence issues. A Transition Working Group has been established and is currently scoping the work to be carried out by the Transition Committees and examining their interface with other implementation structures. Further guidance will be issued in due course.**

## **2.8 Severance**

**2.8.1 The National Association of Councillors met recently with the Minister of Environment to lobby for a severance package for councillors to be made available from May 2009. The Minister had agreed to consider this issue and has asked officials to examine the possibility of including the power to make a severance scheme in the Local Government (Contracts) Bill rather than the Local Government (Finance) Bill. This would allow for a severance scheme to be fast-tracked.**

**2.8.2 It is anticipated that consultation on a possible severance scheme would commence before the end of the year.**

## **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 note the contents of this report"**

The Chief Executive advised the Members that the Boundaries Commissioner had, the previous day, issued a press release regarding the provisional recommendations for the names and number of wards in each of the new eleven Local Government Districts. It was proposed that within the new Belfast Local Government District there should be 60 wards. The Commissioner had recommended that the boundary of the Belfast Local Government District should reflect its setting as encompassed by the surrounding hills, a number of natural features and some major roads. He had proposed that the localities of Gilnahirk, Tullycarnett, Braniel, Castlereagh, Merok, Cregagh, Wynchurch, Glencregagh and Belvoir, which were part of the existing Castlereagh Borough Council area, should be incorporated into the Belfast District; and that the localities of Colin Glen, Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook, Kilwee, Dunmurry, which were part of the existing Lisburn City area, should be incorporated also, as well as a small number of houses, currently within the North Down Borough Council area, at Knocknagoney.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the existing electorate in the Belfast area was 158,000. Under the proposals that would increase by 32,000, making a total electorate of 190,000 and bringing the population of the City up to 318,000. Of the additional 32,000 electors, 14,000 would be transferred from existing localities situated within the current boundaries of Lisburn City Council and 18,000 electors would be transferred from within boundaries of the existing Castlereagh Borough Council.

Written comments on the provisional recommendations could be made to the Boundaries Commissioner until 12th November, 2008. Public hearings would then be held from 20th till 28th November, with the hearings for Belfast being held at Malone House on 20th and 21st November between 10.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. Following the public hearings and consideration of written submissions, the Commissioner would determine his final recommendations and submit a written report to the Department of the Environment by the end of June, 2009. The Department would then lay the report before the Assembly, together with a draft Order in Council giving effect to the recommendations with or without modifications. If modifications were proposed, the Department would be required to lay a statement of reasons for them at the same time. The draft Order would be debated by the Assembly and if approved would then be made and be effective from the date of the next Local Government Elections.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that, when the Council had in 2006 considered the previous proposals, the Members had expressed concern that the information received in relation to the proposed changes had not provided sufficient detail for them to be able to determine the individual streets within the City which had been included within particular wards. Therefore, he had written to the Commissioner requesting that more detailed information be provided to the Council to enable the Members to determine which streets fell within the proposed new Local Government wards within the new boundaries for the City of Belfast. He pointed out that copies of the Provisional Recommendations Report were currently being delivered to each Member of the Council and he requested that the Party Groupings consider any issues which they might have before the Committee's meeting scheduled on 24th October, at which stage a decision could be taken whether to submit a response to the provisional recommendations through the Council or through the Political Parties.

Noted.

### **Northern Ireland Local Government Association**

The Members were reminded that there had been ongoing discussions with regard to the Council's relationship with and engagement within the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, with the Members having expressed concerns in terms of the level of capacity within the Association, the subscription contributions being sought from the Council, the value-for-money received and the lack of representation on the Association's Executive. During April, an All-Party Deputation had met with representatives of the Association to discuss the Council's concerns in more detail. While it had been agreed generally that the Association had made some progress in addressing the majority of issues identified by the Council, there were two areas in which further action was still required. Firstly, the value-for-money received and secondly representation on the Executive Committee. Subsequently, the Association had submitted a formal response to the Council outlining proposals on how those issues could be addressed.

At its meeting on 23rd May, having considered the response submitted by the Association, the Committee had agreed to:

- (i) seek two additional places for the Council's Elected Members on the Association's Executive;
- (ii) a Council official being designated as a Northern Ireland Local Government Association Liaison Officer who would attend Executive meetings of the Association in an observer capacity;
- (iii) authorise payment of the outstanding 50% of the Council's subscription fees for the period 2007/2008; and
- (iv) inform the Association that the Council would be willing to pay an annual subscription of £79,230 (excluding VAT) in respect of the period 2008/2009, which would be proportionate to the percentage of the Northern Ireland population in the Belfast City Council District Electoral area.

The Association had been informed of those decisions and they had been considered by its Executive Committee during June. The Executive had agreed that the Council would be allocated two additional places on the Executive, with the appointments being determined through discussions between the Association's Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin Party nominating officers and the Council's Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin Party Group Leaders. In addition, the Executive had agreed that the Council would have a dedicated Liaison Officer who would have the option to attend the Executive meetings as an observer.

With regard to the subscription proposed by the Council, the Association had raised concerns regarding the potential inequity of the proposal for other Member Councils within the Association and had noted that the current subscription model had been negotiated a number of years ago as part of the constitution of the Association. It was the Association's intention to review the current subscription system in 2010 in the context of the membership of the new constituent Council's post-Review of Public Administration. The Association had therefore requested that other options be considered, with a view to reaching in the interim period a joint accommodation which balanced the proposed reduction in the Council's annual subscription and the need to provide an equitable service to all constituent members. The Association had suggested that consideration be given to the Council providing "in kind" support to offset the proposed reduction in its financial subscription.

The Director of Core Improvement pointed out that the Council already provided support through Legal advice, policy research and advice, business planning and performance management on an ad-hoc basis in the context of both assuring best practice and the Council's continuing engagement with the Review of Public Administration processes, though the proposal which had been put forward by the Association would result in a more formalised process for the Council providing "in kind" support.

Accordingly, it was recommended that:

- (i) the Director of Core Improvement be designated as the Northern Ireland Local Government Association Liaison Officer; and
- (ii) officials from the Council liaise with representatives of the Association to clarify further what was intended by “in kind” support and the associated implications for the Council.

The Committee adopted the recommendations, noted that a further report in this regard would be submitted in due course and agreed that the report include details of the current position of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and what its expected position and influence would be post-Review of Public Administration.

### **Role of Council Improvement Board - Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Relevant Background Information**

**The role of the Council Improvement Board has been raised recently at both Committee and Council meetings and this report addresses key issues for Member consideration.**

**The establishment of a Council Improvement Board (formally Member Improvement Board) was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in June 2005. The role of the Board in the first instance was:**

- **To provide political direction and leadership for the improvement and efficiency agenda**
- **To provide political support in terms of party groupings and committees for the delivery of the improvement and efficiency agenda**
- **To hold officers to account for the delivery of agreed improvement and efficiency actions**
- **To track and monitor the achievement of agreed financial savings**
- **To become involved at an early stage in discussions about how the organisation can best serve the city and improve the lives of its citizens**
- **To engage with peer members and peer councils from other jurisdictions in order to learn from their experiences and inform the improvement/efficiency agenda**
- **To make the Council ‘Fit for Purpose’ to enable the Council to deliver pre and post RPA**

Support for the CIB to deliver on the above was provided through the establishment of a Core Improvement Team (CIT) the focus of the CIT workload was initially on the priorities of Customer Focus, Governance, Performance Management, Resource Allocation and Planning and People Management.

#### **Membership of the Board**

The Policy and Resources Committee agreed that the Board should consist of the six Party Group leaders / or their nominees and the chairmen of the five main committees. The rationale for this was that the Board would have both a direct link into all of the political parties as well as the principle Committees. The appointment of Chairmen was also endorsed in that parties have an additional seat on the Board relative to the D'Hondt allocation of Committee Chairmanships. It was subsequently approved that parties could replace Chairmen with Members who have a particular interest in change and improvement as this would not upset that balance. The membership of the Board therefore consisted of 11 members i.e. Six Party Leaders and the five 'Chairmen' places.

#### **Council Improvement Board Achievements**

The Council Improvement Board met approximately on a monthly basis between September 2005 and June 2007 to lead and oversee all aspects of the Council's Improvement Agenda in line with its role detailed above. The Board was a key driver for change across the organisation challenging many of the Council's internal processes which were preventing it from becoming a modern local authority as identified in the I&DeA review. For example this has led to:

- The implementation of an efficiency agenda delivering £4m savings to the organisation subsequently passed to the ratepayer
- Revisions to Governance and the decision making process – reducing the number of committee meetings by more than 50% from 275 to 127
- Changes to how we manage and report on our finances – aligning financial planning to business planning and rationalisation of the Capital Programme
- The development of a Member led Corporate Plan
- The establishment of corporate indicators and a council wide performance management framework

- The development of a City Investment Strategy providing greater leverage to working with other key providers
- Managing City Hall refurbishment and consequent decanting and accommodation issues
- Redefining our relationships with LPS, publishing cutting edge Rates Guidance for Members and identifying an additional £2-3m of collectables in the rate-base due to vacant properties

The CIB had no decision making powers – with all their work being reported to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval. However it was important at the early stages of the Improvement Agenda to have a small focussed group of Members to lead the development of such a significant change agenda and to be able to discuss and challenge its implications outside of the formal committee structure.

The work of the CIB also highlighted the importance of having a Committee that allows the Council to make overall strategic decisions based on all the resources it has at its disposal which had been identified as part of the review of the Council's committee structures and reinforced the need for an overarching Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

#### Moving from the Council Improvement Board to Strategic Policy & Resources Committee

Following Council approval new committee structures were implemented in July 2007 and this included the establishment of a Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. This committee has overall responsibility for developing and recommending the Council's policy framework, our Corporate Plan, allocating resources, determining the relative priority of issues, integrating activities and managing overall performance.

It should be noted that there were also a number of changes within Party Groups at this time due primarily to the reinstatement of the Assembly which resulted in a number of Councillors not previously involved in the detail of change or improvement taking up key roles.

Strategic Policy and Resources Committees work plan includes the key aspects of the Improvement Agenda – Governance, Performance and Planning, Finance and Resources and People Management and reflects the need for an overarching management committee to build and drive common purpose.

While the Strategic P&R Committee is constituted in accordance with the application of the d'hondt system, given the nature of the decisions to be taken by this committee and its proposed relationship with the other standing committees, it was recommended that Party Groups should allocate their places in the first instance to the Party Group Leaders, and the Chairs of the main committees within their allocation under proportionality.

This recommendation has been taken on board by the Party Groups meaning the Council Improvement Board as it was constituted has defacto been subsumed into the Policy and Resources Committee. The establishment of this new committee also came at an opportune time in that much of the work within the Improvement Agenda was moving from a developmental to an implementation stage. It was therefore important that these issues were considered directly by an overarching committee to ensure council wide implications of delivery could be assessed and decisions made in accordance with this.

While the Strategic P&R Committee now has a number of the levers and tools necessary to drive the organisation forward, delivering the change agenda remains a huge task and Committee needs to consider if it can make the time available or whether a CIB mechanism should be reconstituted to drive things forward.

The Committee has also authorised the Chairman of the Committee to convene a meeting of the Party Group Leaders to discuss important issues, such as the budget and strike action and reports are subsequently brought to Committee.

#### Transition to RPA

The success of the Improvement Agenda to date has demonstrated the importance of placing political direction and leadership at the heart of any change agenda. The Council Improvement Board played a key role in leading and developing the agenda both as a group and as individual Members bringing the debate back into their parties for challenge and discussion. This allowed members and officers to fully discuss and develop key elements of work over a number of months before bringing them into the committee for formal debate and decision making.

In the context of developing a performance managed Corporate Plan the scrutiny role of Committees will be critical in ensuring that targets are met and proper accountability is established to hold officers to account.

It is also important to note that over the coming months the Council's input, response and leadership around the Review of Public Administration will become increasingly important. While it is essential that all aspects of RPA are debated and agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee it may be a useful option to replicate the CIB process to now engage in a formal piece of work around the key issues of the Review which can then be fed in through party groups before formal consideration by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

It is the stated aim of DOE Minister Sammy Wilson to have the RPA in place by 2011 with the potential for some pilot areas of work to be transferred to Councils by 2010. Other key issues to be addressed include the Boundary Commission outcome in 2009, the establishment of transition committees, Member severance and governance matters. Transition will be further complicated by the transfer of function, staff and assets from neighbouring Councils and/or NICS and its agencies. Consideration will also have to be given to the shape of any new organisation and its management team.

This is a large agenda to be addressed in 2009/10 on top of moving the existing Improvement Agenda into delivery mode which will include ensuring that the agreed frameworks on finance, human resources, information, asset management, capital programme, better business, customer focus and area working are undertaken with full cooperation across the Council, Committees and Departments.

There appears to be two broad options to address the need to keep a strong political direction on this future shape of the Council and its improved delivery for the citizen.

- (i) The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee could meet more than once a month with additional meeting to specifically address key strategic and RPA issues. The main advantage is that the Committee is established and any consideration feeds directly into the decision making process but this option has a major impact on Members time.
- (ii) Establish a Transition Board outside of the Committee system to address the key RPA issues. The membership could be similar to the CIB although there are strong arguments to use the Party Leaders group as an overall political accommodation will be crucial to making the necessary but sometimes difficult decisions in a timely fashion.



### Resource Implications

There are no major resource implications other than realignment of time.

### Recommendations

Committee is asked to consider which option best meets future needs.”

During discussion in the matter, the Members expressed the view that both external and internal pressures had made the meetings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee both long and demanding. It was considered that it might be preferable to hold two monthly meetings, one to consider strategic issues, such as the Review of Public Administration, and the other for general operational business.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to adopt option 1 as set out in the report, subject to the future dates and times of the second meeting being agreed with the Party Group Leaders.

### Democratic Services and Governance

#### Requests for the Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality

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

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
The International Federation for the Roofing Trade	The International Federation for the Roofing Trade Congress Dinner  18th November, 2010  Approximately 400 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	It is estimated that 500 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £1,600  Approximate budget remaining £172,620
The Royal Belfast Academical Institution	Dinner to mark the 200th Anniversary of The Royal Belfast Academical Institution  30th April, 2010  Approximately 400 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of The Royal Belfast Academical Institution and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £1,600  Approximate budget remaining £171,020

<b>Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
St Malachy's College	175th Anniversary Dinner  3rd November, 2008  Approximately 160 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 175th Anniversary of St Malachy's College and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £640  Approximate budget remaining £170,380
Business Education Initiative	Awards Ceremony and Dinner  24th October, 2008  Approximately 80 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	This event aims to recognise the achievements of those individuals who have been successful in the Business Education Initiative. This Initiative, administered by the British Council equips students with international experience and essential business skills and also raises the profile of Belfast and Northern Ireland in the United States.  This event contributes to the Council Corporate Strategic Objective of Improving the Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £320  Approximate budget remaining £170,060

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**National Association of Councillors –  
Annual Conference**

The Committee was advised that the National Association of Councillors was holding its Annual Conference in Bournemouth from 10th till 12th October. The theme of this year's Conference was "Communities in Control – Real People, Real Power". The Conference would consider the implication of passing power into the hands of local communities and how to generate vibrant local democracy. It would provide Members with an opportunity to hear from a number of expert speakers, participate in interactive question and answer sessions and hear of best practice in other Local Authorities. The Council had been a member of the National Association for a considerable period of years and had been represented at previous conferences. Those Members who had

attended had found it to be a valuable opportunity to increase their awareness of Members' issues and to be able to discuss with other Councillors from across England, Scotland and Wales issues of mutual interest and concern. The total cost per delegate of attending was £674.

It was recommended that the Committee authorise the attendance at the National Association of Councillors' Annual Conference of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council's representatives on the National Association of Councillors, Northern Ireland Region, the Head of Committee and Members' Services (or their nominees) and a representative of the Party Groupings on the Council not represented by the aforementioned Members and approve the payment of the Conference fees and appropriate allowances in connection therewith.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Finance**

#### **Financial Planning - Update**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd August, the Director of Corporate Services had informed the Members that the rates finalisation for the financial year 2007/08 had resulted in the Council owing the Land and Property Services agency £4,128,553.40. At that meeting it had been agreed that the Party Group Leaders and the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee should meet to discuss initially the implications of the 2007/08 rates finalisation on the 2008/09 budget and the rates setting process for 2009/10. A number of key factors had arisen:

#### **2007/08**

The £4,128,553.40 clawback would have to be met from reserves. That meant that the Council's reserves now stood at £4 million. Best practice would indicate that for a Council the size of Belfast the ideal reserve position should be £10 million.

#### **2008/09**

The projected rates finalisation for 2008/09 would result in a clawback of £700,000. However, that projection did not include additional rate income which would accrue from Victoria Square and vacant property inspections. When those had been included the projection would be a marginal positive outcome for 2008/09. Work had been carried out to assess the impact of inflation and the level of current expenditure on the 2008/09 year-end position. It was agreed that a revised year-end position would be provided to the Committee after the half-year results had become available in November.

#### **2009/10**

A preliminary projection for 2009/10 would indicate that, in order to stand still, a minimum rate increase of 5% would be required. The Party Group Leaders had indicated that an inclusive rates setting process for 2009/10 would be required which would consider both financial and Council priorities at the same time. They had indicated that briefings should be provided to all Members of the Council through the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Departmental Committees on an ongoing basis as part of the rates setting process.

The Party Group Leaders had recommended that a special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, be held in October in order to discuss rates issues and to provide representatives from the Land and Property Services agency with an opportunity to attend. The key areas for discussion would include:

- the accuracy of the current rates estimating model;
- vacant properties;
- debt management;
- the accountability of the Land and Property Services Agency and the development of a Service Level Agreement with the Council; and
- changes to rating policy and regulations.

Following the special meeting, the Committee could then decide how it might wish to engage with the Minister for Finance and Personnel in order to advise him of the Council's proposals on how the current process might be improved.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- (i) noted the current financial issues facing the Council;
- (ii) agreed to receive a revised year-end position after the half-year results had become available;
- (iii) agreed that rates briefings be provided to all the Committees as outlined above;
- (iv) agreed to hold in October a special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, to discuss rates issues and that representatives of the Land and Property Services Agency be invited; and
- (v) noted that a number of special meetings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee would be required to be held in November and December in order to develop the rate for the next year.

### **Capital Programme**

The Committee agreed that a Capital Programme update be considered at the special meeting to consider rates issues which had been agreed earlier in the meeting.

### **Rates Consultation - Review of Domestic Rating**

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to three proposed consultation responses related to the Review of Domestic Rating:

**“Relevant Background Information**

The purpose of this report is to submit for the approval of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee corporate responses to three consultation documents produced by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the area of rates.

Members will be aware that following the restoration of devolution the Executive undertook to carry out a review of the new domestic rating system which had been introduced in April 2007. This is the latest in a series of consultations which have been produced with the aim of improving the domestic rating system. The current consultations focus on three policy areas –

1. the proposed introduction of a rates deferment scheme for home owning pensioners
2. improving data sharing powers to facilitate increased rate relief uptake
3. the introduction of green rebates

Copies of the three consultation papers, along with an associated initial integrated impact assessments and a privacy impact assessment are available on the Review of the Rating Policy website at [www.ratingreviewni.gov.uk](http://www.ratingreviewni.gov.uk). The closing dates for the consultations are 16, 19 and 26 September respectively; therefore, the responses will be sent to the Department of Finance and Personnel with the caveat that they are subject to the approval of the Committee and ratification by the Council, amended versions will then be submitted if necessary.

An overview of the main proposals in each of the consultation documents is highlighted below -

**1. ‘A Rates Deferment Scheme for home owning pensioners’**

The consultation document outlines proposals to introduce a deferment scheme for home owning pensioners, using the equity in their home as security. The proposals would provide eligible home owning pensioners (aged 65 and over), with the possibility of deferring rates subject to certain conditions including minimum equity levels and it being their main residence. This would help home owning pensioners who are ineligible for means tested rate relief or housing benefit. It should be noted that this is not a new form of relief or another allowance but it provides a payment choice allowing rate bills to be conditionally postponed. The consultation document

examines the specific policy issues of introducing such a scheme including the eligibility criteria, the equity levels needed for deferment, interest charging, information gathering and the interaction between deferment and other rating measures and relief options. The consultation paper also explores the potential financial impact of the proposed scheme. It is anticipated that the legislation governing the rates deferment scheme will be in place by August 2009.

2. 'Data Sharing'

One of the key issues to emerge from the Executive's review of the domestic rating system was the low level of take up of reliefs. An Executive commissioned study suggested that improved data sharing between government agencies could better target advice towards those most likely to qualify for the various rate reliefs (lone pensioner allowance, disabled persons allowance and the means tested rates relief scheme) and ease verification of information provided by claimants. This consultation document examines take-up issues and the new legislative cover required to facilitate this. It is envisaged that the necessary legislation to facilitate this will be introduced by the end of 2009.

3. 'Green Rebates'

This consultation seeks views on rate rebates for energy efficient and zero carbon homes. It proposes to introduce new legislation to provide rate rebates to households carrying out energy efficient improvements to their homes such as cavity wall and loft insulation and to provide an initial exemption from rates (for up to five years) for the first residents of new homes that meet the proposed new zero carbon standard. It is envisaged that the legislation required to underpin these proposals will be introduced by the end of 2009.

Key Issues

The Council's proposed responses to the three consultations are attached at Appendix A. However a summary of the key points from each of the proposed responses is outlined below.

1. 'The Rates Deferment Scheme for home owning pensioners' –

- Belfast City Council agrees with the proposal that pensionable age for the purpose of the scheme should be set at 65 but recommends that it should follow the national proposal to gradually increase the state pension age.

- The deferment scheme should be available where only one owner is of pension age but only if the joint owner(s) give written consent and are provided with information on the implications of the agreement. The written consent will cover provisions for repayments following the death of the pensioner or extension of the scheme to the surviving spouse if eligible.
- The Council is of the view that the deferment scheme should apply only in circumstances where the ratepayer has one residence, verified by set criteria.
- The Council believes that if savings or capital exceeds a particular figure than there should be no eligibility to defer rates. The figure suggested is the savings level used for NI rates relief scheme.
- Proposed equity conditions include a minimum of 40% equity to cover the deferred amount and the setting of a level for the amount of deferred rates that cannot exceed the level of equity in the property.
- Verification of the title of the property should be provided by the applicant's solicitor and details of any outstanding debt attached to the property provided by the applicant.
- The Council feels that the deferred amount should take the form of a charge against the subject property to ensure the debt will be repaid when the property is sold.
- The Council believes that the interest rate levied should be tied to the Bank of England (BOE) base rate, and charged at 1% below this. The rate should be fixed annually to the BOE rate on 1<sup>st</sup> April and compound interest charged.
- The Council has set out factors which should be taken into account when determining if the deferred sum should be paid back in a lump sum or by instalment, which are largely determined by individual circumstances. Different repayment arrangements should not apply should the Department decide to terminate the deferment agreement.
- The Council agrees that it should be compulsory for any potential deferment participant to seek independent financial advice, which may be subject to charge, prior to making any decisions about joining the scheme. In addition, the Department should be obligated to provide

full information outlining the commitment and an annual statement of accounts. The Citizens Advice Bureau is considered by the Council to be best placed to provide independent financial advice for participants.

- The deferment scheme should be a last resort remedy only considered if the applicant is not entitled to housing benefit or rate relief.
- The Council believes that empty properties should not be included in the scheme, except where residential/ medical treatment is being provided to the liable person.
- The Council feels that the burden of responsibility should be on the applicant to provide all necessary information to participate in the scheme.
- The Department should have full flexibility to refuse or terminate deferment providing this made on objective criteria based on the information provided.
- Rates are currently Belfast City Council's principal source of income accounting for some 74% of the total. This scheme will have an impact on the annual revenue budget which even conservative estimates put in excess of £400,000 per annum. Therefore the Council is strongly of the view that the burden should fall on Regional Government and the Council should be reimbursed annually for the deferred amount.
- The Council believes that the scheme will not be widely used but would function as an important safety net in helping to ensure that homeowners are able to retain their homes, especially those with high rates burden and with no eligibility to other available forms of relief.

## **2. 'Data Sharing' –**

- Belfast City Council welcomes the proposals in the consultation paper to include clear rules in primary legislation as to what data can be shared, to ensure that only authorised data will be disclosed and thus contribute to the security of the data. The Council also feels that how data is managed, disclosed and transferred is just as important as the law on disclosure of individual items of data.



- It is important to ensure that all staff are fully trained and have a clear understanding and comprehension of the law and data protection principles as well as how this should be applied.
- As citizens see Government as a single entity, the Council welcomes the move towards providing a single point of contact for central Government.
- The Council feels that data sharing as outlined in the consultation is logical and appropriate, providing safeguards to ensure that the data is required for the specific purpose it is obtained and that the data subject is fully aware of why the data has been obtained.
- The sharing of data for the purpose of targeting those most likely to qualify for benefits or rate relief is a logical use of data that is already held by a Government department.
- The Council believes that in the interest of openness and transparency the data subject should have the ability to access the record of who accessed their data and for what purpose. This would add another layer of security and ensure that only appropriate personal data is obtained and for no purposes other than the primary purpose.
- Before data sharing begins, Belfast City Council would like to see an extensive publicity campaign and an assurance that all appropriate Government offices will display posters and leaflets explaining data sharing provisions.
- Land and Property Services should have access to the same data that is already shared between agencies under the Social Security Administration Act.
- The Council supports the data sharing proposals as this will lead to more taxpayers receiving benefits and rate relief to which they are entitled and ensuring an equitable distribution of the rate burden. However, it is important to ensure that protocols are developed and full training given to minimize opportunities for unlawful disclosures the new data security. The Council also proposes that the Government consider including an amendment to Regulation 57 of the Rates Order 1977 to clarify what is meant by 'any information'.

3. 'Green Rebates' –

- Belfast City Council supports the principle of encouraging households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes by rewarding them with a monetary incentive; however the Council does not accept that use of the rates system is the most appropriate way of providing that encouragement.
- While there is not a direct link between use of energy and the rating system, there is a link between energy efficiency and energy bills. The Council believes that a rebate could be paid by way of a credit to be offset against the household energy bill rather than a cash payment.
- The Council supports the proposal to limit the rebate scheme to owner / occupier households.
- There is no merit or logic, in the Council's opinion, in offering a higher rebate to encourage take up of the rate rebate as opposed to a cash payment.
- The Council supports the concept of providing an incentive to encourage the development of zero based carbon homes, but does not consider that allowing a rates holiday for up to five years is the most appropriate approach. The Council believes that an 'energy credit' that can be off set against the energy bill would be a more direct incentive.
- The Council supports the Department's approach to the definition of 'zero carbon'.
- The Council supports the concept of rewarding households for improving energy efficiency, however does not feel that the rates system is the most appropriate method. Should the Department decide to proceed with some form of rates rebate scheme, the Council expects that it will be fully reimbursed for any direct loss of rate income. The alternative is a reduction in the provision of services or an increase in rate bills across all ratepayers.

Decision required

Members are requested to agree the three consultation responses as provided and agree their submission to the Department of Finance and Personnel.”

During discussion in the matter, the Members made the following points in relation to the response to the Rates Deferment Scheme for Home Owning Pensioners:

- that the response be amended to provide that, in addition to the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, the Independent Advice Consortia would be deemed by the Council to be best placed to provide independent financial advice for participants;
- how would the threshold for savings and capital exceeding a certain limit be set? If a savings level of £50,000, which was used for the Northern Ireland rates relief scheme, was applied then those pensioners who had savings which were slightly below the threshold and received rates relief could defer their rates. However, pensioners whose savings were just above the upper limit and whose income might only consist of a small pension would not have the option to defer and those were the people who most likely would wish to avail of the scheme;
- how would the equity level on a property be assessed? Would it be on an annual basis? Given that every property had a different value, and in the current volatile housing market equity levels could fall and rise quite quickly, if the levels were not assessed on a regular basis then negative equity could arise; and
- this would have an impact also on the amount of deferred rates allowed if they were restricted to a certain proportion of the property's equity, particularly if the minimum equity threshold and the percentage allowed were set at too low a rate.

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the Committee approved the proposed responses.

### **Tender for the Supply and Delivery of Annual Supplies**

The Committee granted authority for the commencement of tendering exercises and delegated authority to the Director of Improvement, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, to accept the most advantageous tenders in respect of the following:

- (i) supply of broken stones and screenings for the period from 1st April, 2009 till 31st March, 2010;
- (ii) provision of taxi services for the period from 1st April, 2009 till 31st March, 2010, with the option to renew for a further two years;
- (iii) supply of uniforms and clothing for the period from 1st September, 2009 till 31st August, 2011.

### **Provision of Minibus/Coach Hire Services**

The Committee deferred consideration of the commencement of a tendering exercise for the provision of minibus/coach hire services to enable further information to be provided.

### **Protective Clothing**

The Director of Core Improvement pointed out that the Council spent approximately £350,000 on clothing, footwear and gloves. Council officers were gathering information currently in order to put in place a co-ordinated contract which would potentially generate substantial savings based on presenting to the market an aggregated tender. Accordingly, it would be necessary to extend the existing contracts for gloves and protective clothing for a period of six months to enable the co-ordinated clothing contract to be put in place and he sought the Committee's approval in this regard.

The Committee granted the approval sought.

### **Human Resources**

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

### **Review of Corporate Health and Safety Management Arrangements**

(Mr. J. Heyburn, Principal Consultant, Business Improvement, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd August, it had agreed to the establishment of a post of Senior Corporate Health and Safety Manager, subject to further information being submitted to the Committee on the associated costs.

The Committee was reminded that the post had been considered necessary in order to:

- address the implications of the Corporate Manslaughter Act 2007;
- implement the majority of the recommendations arising from the corporate review of health and safety arrangements which had been undertaken by the Audit, Governance and Risk Services Section; and
- realign the work of the Insurance Unit and the Workplace Health Unit.

The new post had been evaluated by the Business Improvement Service at a salary grade of PO7, which represented an annual salary cost of £40,101 (bottom point) to £42,686 (top point). The former post of Workplace Health Manager was vacant currently and the recommendations from the previous report had included the deletion of

that post. That post had been graded at salary scale PO6 but the postholder had been in receipt of an honorarium payment which had lifted the grade to the top point of PO7. Therefore, there were no additional financial implications arising from the creation of the new post. There would be short-term savings in so far as the old post had been paid at the top point of PO7.

Noted.

### **Work Experience for Ex- offenders**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Purpose of report:**

The purpose of this report is to provide members with additional information on the widening the scope of the council’s work experience scheme, on a pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for ex-offenders<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Relevant background information:**

In August, Committee deferred a decision to widen the scope of the council’s Community Outreach Programme to include the provision of placements for ex-offenders.

Members requested further details on:

1. extending the provision of placements for ex-offenders to include those who would be referred by the Youth Justice Agency (YJA);
2. the implications for the council in respect of Access NI issues

#### **Key Issues:**

##### **Work experience for ex-offenders referred by the YJA**

The YJA is concerned with restorative justice aimed at giving young people (aged 10 to 18 years) the opportunity to understand and make amends to their victims for the consequences of their offending and to take steps to stop future crime.

Following discussions with the YJA the following was confirmed:

1. while the YJA works with young people between the ages of 10 to 18 years, the council would only be asked to provide placement opportunities for those aged between 16 to 18 years.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex- offenders are individuals serving out community service orders which range from 40 to 240 hours

2. the ex-offenders seeking unpaid placements with the council would be deemed suitable to carry out 'service in the community' and would be deemed low to medium risk e.g. criminal damage, disorderly behaviour. No individual deemed to be high risk e.g. with a previous or present sexual offence or serious offence of violence would be seeking a placement with the council.
3. The nature of the offence would be shared with us and all the factors of the particular case would be taken into account before placement within the council.
4. The placements would require supervision at all times and an allocated worker from the YJA would hold quarterly reviews with the appropriate council line managers. However, more frequent contact arrangements can be made, if required.
1. YJA would prefer that, where appropriate, the 'service' would be carried out in the placements own community.
2. The main areas of interest for placements would be Parks, Community Safety, Waste Management, Cleansing and Leisure. It is anticipated however, that as a pilot, the placements will initially be based in Parks.
3. YJA has initially requested up to five placements per year. It is expected to be one to two days per week (depending on individual circumstances), until the 'service in the community' is completed.
4. If required by the council, the YJA will carry out awareness training with relevant council line managers.
5. In accordance with legal advice on insurance arrangements, a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the work experience duties are suitable for the person concerned, appropriate supervision is exercised depending on the nature of the work, location etc, and compliance with all health and safety legislation is in place.

#### Implications in respect of Access NI issues

1. Both the PBNI and YJA have advised that in principle, there is no difficulty with the council requesting its own Access NI checks for the placements; however, due to the timescales involved in receiving information back from Access NI, there would be an impact on their processes. In the case of PBNI, it is a requirement that the community

service order process commences within five working days of the court order being made (i.e. an induction interview must take place with the placement provider). This has been agreed with the Minister, Lord Chief Justice and approved by the Northern Ireland Office. While there may be more flexibility with the Youth Justice Agency, the timeframe for information being received back may cause a problem as other interventions may be required e.g. alcohol programmes

2. Both organisations have indicated that they will provide the council with criminal records for the placements. PBNI has also advised that if there is any other cause for concern, other agencies could be contacted, if required e.g. Social Services, Multi-Agency Offender Assessment and Management (MASRAM).
3. Due to the age of the placements referred by the YJA (16-18 years of age). Access NI checks will be required for employees who will be working with the placements. Many existing employees have already been through this process but YJA has stated that it will incur the cost for any agreed vetting in relation to a placement.

### Resource Implications

#### Financial

There are no financial implications contained within this report as all council work experience placements are unpaid.

#### Human Resource

There are no human resource implications as all work experience placements within the council are dependant on the relevant department having the capacity to accommodate such a request. The council's Trade Union Group has endorsed the initiative.

#### Asset and Other Implications

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

### Recommendations

Members are asked to approve widening the scope of the council's current work experience scheme, on a pilot basis, to include the provision of unpaid work experience placements for

ex-offenders. These placements would be self-insured by the council and, following information sessions for line managers, staff and trade unions to outline specific roles and responsibilities, would be piloted within the Parks and Leisure Department.

#### Key to Abbreviations

PBNI Probation Board for Northern Ireland  
YJA Youth Justice Agency  
MASRAM Multi-Agency Offender Assessment and Management”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

#### 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 persons who were related to existing officers of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointments.

#### Asset Management

#### Future Use of City Hall

The Committee considered the undernoted report regarding the future use of the City Hall:

#### “Relevant Background Information

The current Council will be historically the last Council of the current BCC organisation.

The current Council has also been both courageous and farsighted in taking the tough decision to undertake a major refurbishment, involving a disruptive decanting exercise and major expenditure. In considering the future use of City Hall it is important that this Council continues to clearly focus on the future and to set the tone for the City and the new organisation post 2011.

Symbolically the use of the building in terms of political, public and office uses will be important in terms of the overall leadership and vision Council wishes to set.

In its deliberations on refurbishing City Hall Committee took into consideration a number of issues including health and safety; opportunity to resolve major items of work; minimisation of potential future maintenance problems to reduce cost growth and also the possible opportunities for more public use of the building.



To date there has been a definitive Committee decision as to location of Party Rooms however a number of other location decisions now required to ensure the scheme finishes on target and budget.

### Key Issues

The building work in City Hall is now well underway with decisions regarding floor boxes, partition walls etc having to be taken. To ensure the works are kept to programme and within budget a Committee decision is now required as to future use of City Hall and which parts of the council organisation return to City Hall.

Members have agreed that it is important to have customer facing services in City Hall and to ensure the building is best utilised in terms of its political function, it's public role and as an administrative headquarters. There is now a once in a lifetime opportunity to get this balance right and allow for future flexibility.

Such decisions need to be made in the light of the changing local government scenario as envisaged by RPA ie:

1. There are likely to be boundary changes for BCC with additional workload from neighbouring boroughs together with new functions from various NICS Departments and Agencies.
2. The current Council organisational structure will have to change to accommodate these new functions, boundaries and additional staff. In fact the Council organisation is changing now as we prepare for RPA with more centralisation of transactional activity for efficiency purposes eg Better Business Project and as we extend the role of the Council to address social ills eg Safer City. An additional pressure for restructuring is a number of succession planning issues that will arise at Director level over the next 18 months.
3. Customer Focus will become a greater priority for Council driven by central government; Councillors seeking greater value for rate payers and increasing expectations and demand from citizens.

In view of the above and in order to give us some built in flexibility for the future it is proposed that all staff in Adelaide Exchange with the exception of backroom Financial Services and Core Improvement staff return to City Hall ie Chief Executive, Legal Services, Member and Committee Services, Communications, BDM etc.

### Greater Public Use

Members via the Accommodation Steering Group have advocated the desire for greater public access to the City Hall and have discussed the potential of a coffee bar/café facility following which the Committee then requested a business case, a copy of which has been circulated to the Members.

In summary, so long as a decision is made soon, the £300,000 expenditure associated with the adjustments to the works arising from this change to the brief can be accommodated within the contingency allowance set aside for such introduced variations.

On completion of the Major Works contract Facilities Management will create a theme of 'Titanic' for the coffee bar/café facility. A very conservative approach to customer numbers suggests an £8,500 subsidy is required. However this can be offset to breakeven by the merchandising opportunities availed of in many other Cities. Information has been circulated to the Committee on alternative public uses for a number of City Halls across the UK.

The coffee/café facility can only be accommodated on the ground floor if there is sufficient room to relocate Communications to the upper floors of City Hall – which is made possible by retaining some staff in Adelaide Exchange. The area formerly occupied by Communications in City Hall is the most readily convertible due to the offices having been created by stud walls.

### Customer Focus

The Members view of more customer focused services being located in City Hall can be accommodated as follows:

The ground floor area in City Hall formerly occupied by Legal Services consisted of a number of small offices created on an ad hoc basis over a number of years. The refurbishment has recreated the rooms as original and Legal Services would no longer fit unless a further unsuitable partitioning took place. Again as with Communications Legal Services could be accommodated on the upper floors although it would be beneficial for the Director of Legal Services to retain a ground floor office for ease of access by Members and Chief Executive.

The remaining rooms on the ground floor provide options for creating customer facing one stop shops and/or additional meeting rooms for Members and Constituents.

A further use for one of these large rooms is a permanent location for a City model which is currently being explored with UJJ/QUB and Planning Service. Such a model would be of interest to visitors, and the general public and provide a useful tool for interfacing between Members and developers in regard to planning matters.

#### Member Use

A Final issue which needs agreed is a proposal to enhance the kitchen facilities for Members. The current kitchen in the Members Common Room is unfit for purpose. A Solution exists in moving the Members Common Room to the former PUP room (which has been enlarged due to removal of asbestos filled partition) and dividing the existing Common Room between the PUP and a new kitchen facility.

#### Resources

The £300,000 expenditure can be accommodated within the contingency allowance included in the overall project budget.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Members agree to staff sections returning to City Hall as suggested ie everyone from Adelaide Exchange except Financial Services and Core Improvement.
2. Members agree space is created on the ground floor of City Hall by relocating Communications and Legal Services to upper floors.
3. Members agree ground floor is made available for customer facing services and constituency meeting rooms as the organisations role and structures change.
4. Members decide if a café as proposed is desirable and vary the contract accordingly.
5. Members agree to the suggested changes to the Common Room.”

Several Members expressed the view that they would be opposed to the provision of a coffee bar/café facility within the City Hall since it would be in direct competition with City centre traders who had been providing the service for a number of years. A Member suggested that these concerns could be addressed if the Council were to seek a franchisee to run the facility, thereby providing a business opportunity for local entrepreneurs.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt recommendations (1), (2), (3) and (5). In terms of the use of the area formerly occupied by the Corporate Communications Section, the Committee agreed that it would not be appropriate for the Council to operate a coffee bar/café facility but rather directed that, in the first instance, the area be cleared to enable the option to be left open for it to be used as either an exhibition space or a coffee bar/café facility. In the meantime, officers seek expressions of interest for the taking out of a franchise for the operation of a coffee bar/café within the building on the understanding that a further report providing full details of the arrangement, including installation and refurbishment costs and operating revenue, be submitted to the Committee prior to any authority for such a venture being granted.

### **arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Facilities - Proposals for Community Consultation**

(Mr. W. Francey, Director of Health and Environmental Services, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the process for consulting the local community in regard to the possible provision of land for an arc21 residual waste treatment facility:

#### **“Purpose of the Report.**

To present recommended options to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee (the Committee) on the process for consulting the local community on the possible transfer of land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for the purposes of building and operating a residual waste treatment facility; namely a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility or an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility.

#### **Relevant Background Information.**

At its meeting on 22nd August, the Committee considered a report on the proposed transfer of land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for potential use for development of a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility or an Energy from Waste (EfW) incineration facility. The report had highlighted the timescale constraints faced by arc21 concerning the inclusion of sites in its site selection process and its stated position that a delay in the decision on the availability of the land beyond September 2008 could prevent delivery of the project in time to avoid non-compliance fines. Following discussion the Committee decided that, to take an informed decision, there should be consultation with the local community to establish whether location of an EfW incinerator on the site would be appropriate. A copy of the relevant extract from the minutes from 22nd August has been circulated. The Committee's decision was approved by the Council at its meeting on 1st September.

The Chief Executive wrote to arc21's Chief Executive on 2nd September to inform him of the Council's decision and to confirm that the Council would be unable to decide on the availability of the proposed site during September.

The matter was reported to the arc21 Joint Committee at its meeting on 4th September. The Joint Committee considered the main consequences of delay and adopted a recommendation to wait until early December for confirmation of the Council's decision on site availability. It also agreed that baseline environmental studies be commenced, up to a maximum cost of £10,000, so as to prevent avoidable delay in the project delivery date.

Officers have looked at options for consulting local people and a recommended approach to the consultation, with options for its geographical scope, is set out below. The following recommendations take into account a number of issues including equality considerations and best practice consultation and engagement processes.

#### Key Issues.

##### Equality Considerations

The Equality Officer has considered the project and does not believe that the decision on disposal of land for such purposes will have an adverse impact on any of the Section 75 groups and therefore recommends that the policy can be screened out. (Members are also asked to note that the wider Arc 21 Waste Management Plan has been subject to consultation and EQIA). However, she has made the point that consultation with all affected stakeholders is now a major principle of modern good governance and best practice. As this decision potentially affects all residents in Belfast, she suggests that the Council should consider whether the consultation should enable all the ratepayers of Belfast to provide their views. Accordingly, she recommends that consideration be given to:

- an information process for all ratepayers in Belfast explaining the issues being consulted on and why;
- a city-wide mechanism for enabling the public to comment on the proposed land transfer; and,
- a series of roadshows (or similar) across the city to provide opportunities to discuss issues and concerns

While the Equality Officer has expressed the above view, should Members decide to restrict the consultation to the "local community" of North Belfast, she has recommended that this should focus on the geographical boundary comprising of the Castle, Court and Oldpark electoral areas.

**Inform, Consult and Involve – Good Practice**

The first stage in any process of consultation and engagement is ‘informing’ – providing residents with information on which to judge the Council’s performance or to inform a decision. This recognised approach is now also reflected in Government policy. Many Councils across the UK have adopted the following tiered definition, based on A Ladder of Citizen Participation (SJ Arnstein 1969) and as adapted by the International Association for Public Participation.

Level	What’s involved
1. Inform	Giving people information and telling them about our services
2. Consult	Consulting over options - asking people for their views in surveys and forums
1. Involve	Enabling the community to influence priorities and actions by discussing the issues and priorities and working together to improve and design new services

**Proposed Approach to Consultation**

In the event that the Committee agrees to a citywide consultation exercise, it is proposed that:

1. A questionnaire be sent to all households and business addresses in Belfast. However, respondents will be asked to tell us which part of Belfast they live in so that the results can be segregated and, subject to adequate response rates, we should be able to differentiate between residents, business and broad areas of Belfast including those living in North Belfast.

The Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIS) advises that respondents should be allowed 4 clear weeks to respond to postal surveys. This will be factored into the consultation process. A copy of the proposed questionnaire and cover letter has been circulated to Members.

2. A user-friendly information sheet be included with the questionnaire to help explain the issues and the technical terms so that people can make an informed response to the consultation. A copy of the information sheet has been circulated to Members.

3. A series of informal roadshows be held in various locations across the city to enable local people to drop by and get more information, ask questions and provide more detailed comment about these proposals. The roadshows will be staffed by Council employees. The roadshow schedule is currently being organised, details of which will be included in the information sheet which will accompany the questionnaire.
4. A dedicated information webpage be set up on the Council website where people can get more information, including access to the Waste Plan briefings and photographs etc.

If the Committee wishes to restrict consultation to the community of north Belfast the same approach would be recommended, but with the questionnaire (1 above) sent only to households in that part of the city. The roadshows (3 above) would also be restricted to locations in north Belfast.

#### Scope of questions / issues

Members will recall that the proposed transfer of land to arc21 is for the purposes of building a residual waste treatment facility. This will either take the form of a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility or an Energy From Waste (EfW) incineration facility. The discussion at Committee tended to focus on the EfW incineration facility – perhaps because it was felt likely to cause the most concern to local residents. However the Council has been asked to make a decision on the transfer of land for either a MBT or an EfW facility. Therefore for completeness, the proposed consultation deals with both scenarios and the questionnaire asks people their views on the potential use of the site for either of these facilities. Members are asked to approve the inclusion of questions relating to both MBT and EfW facilities within the questionnaire.

#### Resource Implications

The cost of the recommended citywide consultation and engagement process is outlined below.

<i>City Wide</i>	<i>Cost</i>	
<i>Questionnaire:</i>		
Printing	£10,500	Households (128,000) and business (9,150)
Postage & Packaging	£29,700	
Freepost Returns	£4,000 – £12,000	10% response rate = £3700 20% response rate = £7,406 30% response rate = £11,109
Input & Analysis	£12,250	Estimated (based on industry rates)
<i>Information Sessions:</i>		
Banners/Posters	£500	Officer time - uncosted
<b>Total</b>	<b>£56,950 – £64,950*</b>	

If consultation is restricted to the community of north Belfast the estimated costs of the various elements are as follows:

<i>North Belfast</i>	<i>Cost</i>	
<i>Questionnaire:</i>		45,200 households - Castle, Court & Oldpark electoral areas
Printing	£4,130	households only
Postage & Packaging	£12,750	
Freepost Returns	£ 1220 – £3660	10% response rate = £1,220 20% response rate = £2,440 30% response rate = £3,660
Input & Analysis	£5,000	Estimated (based on industry rates)
<i>Information Sessions:</i>		
Banners/Posters	£500	Officer time - uncosted
Total	£23,600 – £26,040	

\*Note: it has been estimated that the above costs could be reduced by up to 75% by using a representative sample, with the results still remaining statistically valid. However, by sending the information sheet that accompanies the questionnaire to all households, either in Belfast or in the north of the city, the Council has an opportunity to inform and raise awareness of the issues with a wider section of the population. The added benefit in this regard of a full household survey as opposed to a representative sample would need to be considered alongside the costs.

#### Recommendations.

Members are asked to approve the following recommended approach to consulting and engaging with local people on whether to transfer land at the North Foreshore to arc21 for the purposes of building and operating a residual waste treatment facility (ie a MBT or an EfW facility) and to decide on the options concerning the geographical scope of the survey:

- (i) A questionnaire in the form set out in Appendix 2 be sent to:
  - (a) all household and business addresses in Belfast; or,
  - (b) all household addresses in north Belfast; or,
  - (c) a representative and statistically viable sample based on either option (a) or (b) above;
- (ii) A user-friendly information sheet subject to possible changes highlighted through piloting of the form to ensure it is easy to understand and complete) to accompany the questionnaire to explain the issues raised and the terms used in the questionnaire;



- (iii) **A series of informal sessions be held in various locations across the city (or in north Belfast only if (i) (b) is chosen) to enable local people to drop by and get more information, ask questions and provide more detailed comment about these proposals; and,**
- (iv) **A dedicated information webpage be set up on the Council website where people can get more information, including access to the Waste Plan.**

### **Key to Abbreviations**

**MBT – Mechanical Biological Treatment**

**EfW – Energy from Waste”**

In response to a number of questions, the Director of Health and Environmental Services explained that the notes in the information sheet to be included with the questionnaire were based on the information which had been provided to the Elected Members through a series of reports to Committees and through Party Group briefings. The sheet was an attempt to assist the public to understand what Mechanical Biological Treatment and Energy from Waste facilities were, why they would be needed and the issues associated with where they would be located. He stated that the Council needed to make a decision regarding the consultation process it wished to employ concerning the transfer of land if the results were to be reported to Committee in time to enable arc21 to meet its project timetable for the inclusion of sites in its site selection process. If the Committee was minded to defer consideration of the matter until its meeting on 24th October, any decision taken then would not be ratified until the Council meeting on 3rd November. This would not enable reporting of the consultation outcome in time for a Committee decision in November and consequently no Council decision would be made at the beginning of December. He explained that any further delay in arc21's process beyond that time would result in unavoidable delays in project delivery with consequential liability to non-compliance fines.

It was suggested that the Committee could seek delegated authority from the Council to take a decision regarding the consultation proposals at a special meeting of the Committee, to which all Members could be invited, during mid-October. However, it was explained that if it were agreed to take such a course of action, only the Members of the Committee could vote in the matter. If the Committee wished every Member of the Council to participate in the decision, then it would need to hold a Special Council meeting instead.

After a lengthy discussion in the matter, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable the proposed consultation process to be validated by a professional consultancy service and recommended to the Council that the proposals for the community consultation be considered at a Special Meeting of the Council to be held in mid-October.

## **Estates Issues**

### **Exchange of Land Carr's Glen Linear Park**

The Committee was advised that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 7th November, 2006, had agreed to an exchange of lands between the Council and the Belfast Education and Library Board to facilitate the redevelopment of the Boys Model School at Carr's Glen. Following further discussions with representatives of the Board, it had been agreed to amend the detail of the land exchange. The recommended land areas were considered by officers from both the Education and Library Board and the Council to represent a better solution because the original proposal would have created a dead-end path on Council-owned land, which could have become a gathering place with the ensuing possibility of anti-social behaviour which might have spilled over into the school grounds, while the revised proposal created a shorter boundary and eliminated the dead-end path and therefore reduced the possibility of creating a gathering space adjacent to the school boundary.

The Director of Core Improvement pointed out that it would now be necessary to alter again the proposed lands to be transferred and he sought the Committee's authority to conclude the negotiations in this regard.

The Committee approved the exchange of lands with the Belfast Education and Library Board and authorised the Director of Core Improvement to agree the revised boundaries, subject to the completion of appropriate legal agreements.

### **Proposed Acquisition of Land at Eversleigh Street**

The Committee was informed that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 14th February, had agreed, in principle, to accept the acquisition of land at Eversleigh Street, off My Lady's Road, from the Housing Executive at nil cost but subject to:

- (i) the land being used to provide a play facility;
- (ii) an agreement being reached on the scheme design;
- (iii) external funding being secured; and
- (iv) the Council managing the completed facility and becoming responsible for routine maintenance and equipment replacement as necessary. In addition, the Council would be required to carry public liability insurance for the facility following completion of the works.

In accordance with Standing Order 60, the Committee noted the acquisition of the land.

### **City Cemetery Gate Lodge (Fox's Lodge)**

The Members were informed that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee had agreed previously to dispose of the dwelling known as Fox's Lodge which fronted the Whiterock Road at the City Cemetery. The proposed disposal was to be through a Development Brief, preferably by way of a 25 year lease, although longer-term arrangements would be considered. The primary objective contained within the Development Brief was to achieve restoration of the Lodge and the adjoining buildings in a sensitive manner which respected the architecture of the original building and the nature of the immediate surroundings in the City Cemetery.

The Director of Improvement pointed out that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 3rd May, 2007, had agreed that any monies raised from the disposal should be set against expenditure required within the City Cemetery. He explained that that decision was contrary to the Local Government Act, which required any capital receipt to clear debt in respect of the asset involved, then general debt and only then for other purposes if approved by the Department of the Environment.

After discussion, the Committee approved the disposal of Fox's Lodge, agreed that the Development Brief be submitted to the Committee for consideration and agreed also that any capital receipt be treated in accordance with legislative requirements.

### **Specify Construction Excellence Awards**

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

The Committee was reminded that, as part of the Buildings Upgrade Programme, the Stables building located in the Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park had been refurbished. The project had been designed and managed by the Property Maintenance Unit and the work had now been completed. The upper tier of the building now housed the Conservation Unit of the Parks and Leisure Department, while the restaurant area, which was located on the ground floor, had been franchised and was operating successfully in providing a much-needed facility for visitors and tourists.

The Head of Facilities Management pointed out that, while the building has been brought back into use successfully and was an attractive and financially viable property, the most notable feature of the project was that the site had become the first Council property to achieve a potentially zero carbon footprint. This had been achieved using sustainable technologies and demonstrated in a very practical and visual way the Council's commitment to sustainability and civic management. He explained that the project had been entered for consideration under the highly prestigious Specify Construction Excellence Awards 2008. Over seventy submissions had been made in respect of those awards, most of which were submitted by large private-sector construction companies. The Council had been informed that the Stables project had been short-listed in two categories, that is, Restoration and Environmental Sustainability. This was a very significant achievement for the Unit, since the project was the only public-sector finalist in both categories.

The winners in each category would be announced at the annual awards event which would take place on 9th October at the Culloden Hotel. The Head of Facilities Management stated that, in the circumstances, it would be appropriate for the Council to take one table at the event and that the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with the relevant officers involved in the design management of the project, be invited to attend and he recommended accordingly. The total cost would not exceed £500 plus VAT.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Good Relations and Equality**

#### **Minutes of Good Relations Partnership**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership of 5th September.

### **Cross-Cutting Issues**

#### **Affiliation of HMS Duncan to the City of Belfast**

(Mr. G. Copeland, Events Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was informed that correspondence had been received from Rear Admiral Philip Jones, Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland, enquiring whether the Council would agree to the affiliation of HMS Duncan, the Royal Navy's newest Type 45 Destroyer which was currently under construction in the United Kingdom, to the City of Belfast.

The Committee was advised that if Belfast were to accept the offer the City would share a joint affiliation to the ship with Dundee City, though the name of the ship would not be changed to reflect either affiliated City. A number of benefits would accrue to the City. Firstly, the historical connection, since Belfast had not had a formal relation to a Royal Naval vessel since the HMS Belfast. Secondly, the creation of a formal affiliation to HMS Duncan would allow Belfast to be promoted as the vessel toured the globe. Thirdly, the link with the Destroyer would see the ship and its crew of 195 make regular visits to Belfast. Such visits would not only have civic opportunities but provide economic returns from crew expenditure during their stay in the City. Fourthly, the creation of a formal relationship with HMS Duncan would allow Belfast to further develop its historical maritime connections, including links to other countries with operational naval vessels such as the Irish Naval Service.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Rodway,  
Seconded by Councillor W. Browne,

That the Committee agrees to accept the offer for the affiliation of HMS Duncan to the City of Belfast.

On a vote by show of hands four Members voted for the proposal and four against. There being an equality of votes, the Chairman exercised her second and casting vote for the proposal and it was accordingly declared carried.

### **Consultation Response - Delivering the Bamford Vision**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Relevant Background Information**

##### **Purpose**

To present to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee a suggested response to the Northern Ireland Executive’s consultation ‘Delivering the Bamford Vision’ and to bring to the attention of Members details of the Executive’s proposals for implementing the findings of the Bamford Review.

##### **Background**

In October 2002, the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) initiated an independent review of the law, policy and service provision affecting people with a mental health problem or a learning disability – now referred to as the Bamford Review. The review produced a series of 10 separate reports between June 2005 and August 2007. Together these reports contained almost 700 recommendations, many of which have already influenced policy and service developments. This consultation document represents the Northern Ireland Executive’s response to the Bamford Review. It sets out the Government’s long term vision for improving services for people with a mental health problem or a learning disability and its proposals for achieving this over the next 10-15 years.

#### **Summary of the Consultation**

##### **The Bamford Vision**

The NI Executive has ‘accepted the thrust of the Bamford recommendations’ and has adopted the Bamford vision, which aims to:

- promote the mental health and wellbeing of the whole community and in parallel decrease the prevalence of mental ill-health through preventative action;
- value those with mental health needs or a learning disability by asserting their rights to full citizenship, equality of opportunity and self-determination;

- provide a legislative framework, based on principles which protects the dignity and human rights of people with a mental health problem or a learning disability; and,
- reform and modernise services in a way that will make a real and meaningful difference to the lives of people with mental health needs or a learning disability and their carers and families.

To make this vision a reality, the NI Executive will seek to provide:

‘Person-centred, seamless community-based services, informed by the views of service users and their carers, making early intervention a key priority and protecting and promoting people’s mental health.’

#### Delivering the Vision

The consultation document explains how the Government intends to deliver the Bamford vision through:

- Coordinating structures across the NI Executive
- Legislative Reform
- Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (including domestic violence)

It also explains how this will be delivered in the Health & Social Care Sector, with particular focus on:

- Learning Disability and Autism
- Adult Mental Health
- Children and Young People’s Mental Health
- Older People’s Mental Health and Dementia
- Alcohol and Substance Misuse
- Forensic Mental Health Services

#### Key Actions and Targets

The key actions and associated targets are summarised below:

- Establish the Health and Social Care Task Force by March 2009.
- Establish the Bamford Monitoring Group by September 2009.

- Introduce new mental health legislation and new mental capacity legislation by 2011 and 2014 respectively (to protect the rights of people unable to make their own decisions about their mental health treatment and other health, care and financial and property issues)
- Reviews of inpatient and community based mental health and learning disability services by December 2008 and September 2009 respectively
- The development of Service Frameworks for 'mental health services' and for 'learning disability services' by December 2008 and September 2009 respectively and the Development of common care pathways with agreed referral thresholds across Northern Ireland by September 2009 (to ensure more uniform, regionally agreed models of care)
- Reduce the overall suicide rate by 15% by 2011 (taken from Protect Life –A Shared Vision, 2006)
- Targets in relation to binge drinking and the use of illicit drug taking
- A number of targets / actions aimed at:
  - Reducing long term stays in learning disability and mental health hospitals;
  - Improving hospital discharge times;
  - Improving community care / at home support and respite packages;
  - Improving waiting times, referral thresholds and access to defined services
  - Reducing admissions to mental health hospitals; and
  - Ensuring that by 2014 no-one will have a hospital as their permanent address.
- The development or revision of strategies on:
  - Promoting Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan by 2009

- Promoting the social inclusion of people with a mental health problem or a learning disability through the 'Just Like You' vision by 2009
- Improving access to psychological therapies by September 2008
- Services for people with a personality disorder by December 2008
- Dementia services, including the needs of younger people by December 2008
- Provision of low secure and community forensic placements by March 2009
- Actions and targets in relation to:
  - The proportion of HSC spend on mental health services and learning disability services which is spent on community based services
  - The number of recipients of Direct Payments.
  - Workforce development and planning
  - Information and advice services (including improved information systems and management)
  - Awareness Raising and Media Campaigns (and specifically Domestic & Sexual Violence)

### Funding

As a result of the recent Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), additional funding of £19.75m (2008/09), £23.6m (2009/10) and £44m (2010/11) will be made available for mental health and learning disability services – an increase of 12% and 9% respectively. According to the document, older people with dementia will benefit, along with other older people, from increased funding under the CSR to adjust for growth in that section of the population. For example, funding is earmarked within the £44m package to provide additional respite care packages for people with dementia.

The full consultation document (112 pages), and a 15 page summary document can be accessed at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/showconsultations?txtid=30219>  
The deadline for responses is 3rd October 2008.



## Key Issues

### The Challenge

The Bamford Review estimated that within Northern Ireland:

- About 250,000 adults and 45,000 children and young people have a mental health problem;
- About 26,500 people have a learning disability, of whom about half are aged 0-10; and,
- About 20,000 people have dementia.

In 2002/03, a study by the NI Association for Mental Health and the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimated that the total costs of mental illness in Northern Ireland amounted to £2.8 billion or £1,680 per head of population. In comparison, the total health and social care budget in that year was £2.4 billion. A clear message from the Bamford Review, and reiterated in this consultation document, is that good mental health should be valued and that it should be a shared responsibility.

### Key Themes

In responding to this challenge the Government has proposed a number of actions. When reading the document, it appears that these have been based on the following underlying principles:

- Person – centred services
- Meaningful user and carer participation in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services
- Early intervention and promotion
- Greater consistency across Northern Ireland
- Greater coordination and integration (seamless services)
- Shift away from large institutional hospital care towards community care
- Decreasing reliance on specialist learning disability services towards improved access and use of mainstream services.

In keeping with the early intervention element of the Bamford vision, the consultation document states that work with children and young people must be seen as a priority. Other key action areas include older people and dementia, suicide prevention and alcohol and drug abuse.

#### Belfast City Council

Belfast, as a city with high levels of deprivation, also experiences higher than average levels of mental ill health Belfast. It is an important policy area and in response to previous Bamford review consultations, Members have expressed concerns about the number of suicides, especially amongst young people and have highlighted the need for a more holistic view of healthcare generally in terms of, for example, encouraging greater participation in sporting activities and in the use of leisure and recreation facilities as methods of improving well-being and ultimately reducing the levels of a number of preventative illnesses. Members have also highlighted the need for greater emphasis on prevention and participation.

Where appropriate the Council has previously responded to area specific consultations resulting from the Bamford Review. Where the content was of a technical nature or required knowledge of professional care management in the field of mental health, we provided an acknowledgement letter as a courtesy which typically provided broad support for principles and objectives aimed at improving the quality of life for all. We have also previously highlighted the high incidence of deprivation within Belfast and its higher than average levels of mental ill health.

#### Role of Local Government

The focus of the consultation is on how the NI Executive as a whole, and the health and social care sector in particular, intends to address the findings and recommendations of the Bamford Review. However, the document also states that 'everyone has a part to play – individual service users, their carers, the independent sector, the wider public sector and the general public'. Whilst the document does make mention of the role of the voluntary sector, there is no real mention of the role of local government or the contribution that local council services can make to improved well-being. This omission is pointed out in the attached draft response.

To maximise cross-sectoral working, the Bamford Review had recommended the establishment of a Regional Mental Health Promotion Directorate, under a Regional Director, located at the heart of Government, specifically in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. However, while the NI Executive accepted

that each Department had a vital role to play in promoting positive mental health, it did not feel that moving the coordinating responsibility from DHSSPS, where it currently sat alongside and is inextricably linked with other healthy lifestyle strategies and programmes, would be appropriate. The NI Executive believes that the structures it has and will put in place (as outlined in the Investing for Health strategy and suicide prevention strategy) will achieve the co-ordinated action required across Departments.

Following consultation with Departments, a draft response has been prepared for consideration of Members and is attached at appendix 1.

### Recommendations

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee is requested to approve the attached response to the consultation document and to approve its submission to the Northern Ireland Executive.

### Documents Attached

Appendix A: Draft Belfast city council Response to the NI Executive Consultation on delivering the Bamford Vision.

### Appendix A

#### PROPOSED COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE'S CONSULTATION:  
'DELIVERING THE BAMFORD VISION - THE RESPONSE OF  
NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE TO THE BAMFORD REVIEW OF  
MENTAL HEALTH AND LEARNING DISABILITY'

### Belfast City Council Response

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on '*DELIVERING THE BAMFORD VISION - The Response of Northern Ireland Executive to the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability*'.

The Council is committed to working in partnership to improve the quality of life and well-being of all people living in Belfast. As a city with high levels of deprivation, Belfast also experiences higher than average levels of mental ill health. The Council is therefore supportive of efforts to improve mental health and well-being within Northern Ireland and is keen to work in partnership with Government, communities and other sectors to make this happen.

Detailed comment is provided below using the response template provided. Please note: we have not included comment where questions require specialist knowledge or technical/ professional expertise.

**Consultation Questions:**

**The Bamford Vision**

**Q1. Chapter 2 sets out a vision statement for delivery of services for people with a mental health problem or a learning disability. Is this statement acceptable? If not, what needs to be changed in it?**

We welcome the vision to provide 'person-centred, seamless community-based services' and in particular the vision that public sector organizations will work better together to promote positive mental health.

BCC is committed to improving quality of life for all. The Review of Public Administration will give councils a new power of wellbeing. It will therefore use this new power to become much more involved in promoting health and wellbeing including mental health and wellbeing. Also through the new duties associated with community planning the council will be able to support greater co-ordination of services in these fields throughout the City.

The council would ask that the role and contribution of local councils be better reflected in the final response document, so as to ensure that potential opportunities to work in a co-ordinated and holistic person-centred manner are identified and availed of.

**Human rights, Equality of Opportunity and Social Inclusion**

**Q2. Chapter 3 deals with human rights, equality of opportunity, social inclusion. Do you agree that the proposed programme to promote social inclusion is needed? If not, why not?**

BCC provides a range of services within communities. We recognize the importance of and are committed to ensuring, equality and social inclusion of people with a mental health problem or a learning disability in the provision of these services.

**Funding**

**Q3. Chapter 4 summarises current health and social care funding for mental health and learning disability services and proposes targets for the proportion of this which should be spent on community services. Is this the right balance? If not, what should the balance be?**

As local authorities become more involved in promoting health and wellbeing (including mental health) within communities (as envisaged through RPA), this may have implications for funding. Consideration may need to be given as to how this will be resourced.

### Structures

Q4. Chapter 5 describes the groups that have been or will be established to help deliver the Bamford vision across Government. Are these acceptable? If not, what changes do you want to see to these arrangements?

Q5. In particular, are the proposals to establish a Bamford Monitoring Group acceptable? If not, what arrangements do you want to see to ensure that Government is challenged by stakeholders?

It will be important to ensure that local government with its developing role in health and wellbeing is able to liaise with and have effective input to these various groups.

### Promoting Mental Health Strategy

Q6. Chapter 6 describes the work proposed to update the cross-Departmental strategy and action plan for promoting mental health. Are these acceptable? If not, what changes do you want to see?

There is no mention of the role or possible future role of local government within the strategy and action plan.

Belfast City Council is committed to working along with other agencies to achieve the regional target of a reduction in the overall suicide rate by 15% by 2011 (taken from *Protect Life – A Shared Vision*, published in October 2006). In this regard the council provides representation at officer and member level on the Belfast Prevention of Suicide and Self harm steering group and associated working groups. We are currently establishing a multi agency group to produce protocols aimed at dealing with potential clustering of suicides within communities. The council is keen to provide a civic leadership role in this regard.

Local authorities provide a range of services which can impact on people's mental health – leisure / parks / community services etc. They operate a range of community based services and facilities which would be well placed to be involved in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing within communities. Councils are also major

employers (Belfast CC employs approx 2500 employees) with a duty for the health and wellbeing of their employees. They also enforce health and safety at work legislation in a range of workplaces, and therefore have the potential to influence good working practices and subsequently the mental health of other workers.

#### Legal Framework

Q7. Chapter 7 describes the work proposed to develop new mental health law and capacity law within a common framework. Are these acceptable? If not, what changes do you want to see?

No Comment

#### Health and Social Care Sector

Q8. Chapter 8 identifies a range of issues that need to be addressed within the health and social care sector to deliver the Bamford vision. Are these issues acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?

The Council would welcome ongoing dialogue about the future use of facilities in the city in order that opportunities for shared and integrated facilities can be availed of for the benefit of local communities.

#### Care Pathways and Accessing Services

Q9. Chapter 8 identifies the need to agree common care pathways for people accessing the range of mental health and learning disability services. Do you agree that this is needed? If not, what should be done to address the problem?

No Comment

#### Services for People with a Learning Disability

Q10. Chapter 9 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve services for people with a learning disability. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?

No Comment

### Services for Adults with Mental Health Problems

Q11. Chapter 10 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve services for adults with mental health problems. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?

No Comment

### Services for Children and Young People with Mental Health Problems

Q12. Chapter 11 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve services for children and young people with mental health problems. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?

Whilst the Council cannot comment on clinical aspects of mental health care, we are committed to delivering better services to children and young people. The Council runs a Youth Panel which engages directly with young people, and is also working to develop coordinated and consistent responses to meeting the particular needs and challenges faced by young people. The Council has a number of facilities, such as community and leisure centres, and operates a range of programmes and initiatives which taken holistically contribute to improved health promotion and well-being. It is therefore important that other services and positive contributions to health promotion and well-being which exist outside the traditional Health and Social Services field are taken into account.

### Services for Older People with Mental Health Problems or Dementia

Q13. Chapter 12 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve services for older people with mental health problems or dementia. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?

Whilst the Council cannot comment on clinical aspects of mental health care, we are committed to delivering better services for older people. The Council, in collaboration with other agencies and older people themselves, is initiating dialogue and supporting programmes aimed at enhancing older people's quality of life. This work may provide opportunities for raising mental health issues and improving services and access. The Council has a number of facilities, such as community and leisure centres, and operates a range of programmes and initiatives which taken holistically contribute to improved health promotion and well-being. It is important that services such as these, which exist outside the traditional Health and Social Services field, are also considered and utilised where appropriate.

**Services for People with Mental Health Problems and Addiction**

**Q14. Chapter 13 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve services for people with mental health problems and addiction problems. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?**

**The council is keen to work in partnership to improve the health and wellbeing for all the people and communities of Belfast. As referred to above, we operate a range of facilities and services that contribute positively to well-being.**

**Departmental Actions**

**Q16. Appendix 1 summarises the actions being taken by Departments other than DHSSPS to improve services for people with a mental health problem or a learning disability. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?**

**The Council's Parks and Leisure Department would concur with the evidence provided by the recent Mencap Sports Strategy about the value of sport and physical recreation as a primary health improvement tool.**

**The Council's Parks and Leisure Department also welcomes the target of increasing by 2017 the number of people with a disability who regularly participate in sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland by 6%. The Belfast Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy recommends that Belfast City Council should appoint a development officer for activities for disabled people.**

**Forensic Mental Health Services**

**Q15. Chapter 14 identifies a range of issues that are being or will be addressed to improve forensic mental health services. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?**

**No Comment**

**Equality**

**Q16. Appendix 1 summarises the actions being taken by Departments other than DHSSPS to improve services for people with a mental health problem or a learning disability. Are these acceptable? Are there any other issues which should be added?**



**Q17. Appendix 3 describes the outcome of the equality screening exercise. Do you think that the proposals outlined in the Executive's response to the Bamford Review are likely to have any adverse impact on equality of opportunity or on good relations with regard to the Section 75 categories of people?**

**Q18. If you believe there are likely to be adverse impacts on any of the Section 75 categories of people, can you suggest any ways in which they could be reduced or alleviated in the proposals?**

**Q19. Are you aware of any other equality implications likely to arise from the proposals?**

The Council would draw attention to the need to support the community as it emerges from 30 years of protracted violent conflict and the impact this has had on mental well-being. We believe that it is the duty of all policy-makers and service delivery agencies to acknowledge the deeply divided context within which we work and to contribute in a meaningful way to developing better relations within our society. This will not only enhance general well-being but will also contribute to government objectives of building community cohesion and developing a more shared society.

#### **General**

**Q20. Are there any other comments you wish to make?**

The Council has previously highlighted the need for a more holistic view of healthcare generally, in terms of, for example, encouraging greater participation in sporting activities and in the use of leisure and recreation facilities as methods of improving well-being and ultimately reducing the levels of a number of preventative illnesses.

We particularly endorse an emphasis on prevention and participation

High quality open spaces play a role in improving physical and mental well being. The Council provide a wide range of open spaces in the city and hope to have a positive effect on health statistics by providing opportunities for everyone to take part in all sorts of recreation.

The Council's Parks and Leisure Department would ask that consideration be given to the potential for other government departments and agencies to work with the council to develop facilities for people with a mental health problem or a learning disability. These could include sensory gardens or specially adapted playgrounds within council parks or open spaces."

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that there were limited facilities provided for people with learning difficulties, particularly young adolescents, and this needed to be addressed, with additional resources being targeted at that area. In addition, the key actions outlined in the consultation document should have meaningful targets.

After discussion, the Committee approved the proposed response and agreed that it be forwarded to Groups in the City who dealt with self-harm in order to seek their views thereon before being submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive.

Chairman