

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 24th October, 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, C. Maskey,  
P. Maskey, McCann, Newton and Rodway.

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

### Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Smyth.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th September 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 October, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "Staff Travel Policy" which, at the request of Councillor Rodway, had been 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 19th September under the heading "Staff Travel Policy". Councillor Rodway, at whose request the minute had been taken back for further consideration, advised the Committee that he had met with the Head of Financial Services to discuss a number of changes which he felt should be included within the policy. A copy of the revised policy, which incorporated the aforementioned changes which are underlined, is set out hereunder:

### "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 and Council 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 all attendances for the Chief Executive and 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 2,

**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 3.

**8.0 Reporting Arrangements**

8.1 Each standing committee will receive a monthly report on travel activity for the department(s) they are responsible for. Financial information will not be provided in this report.

8.2 COMT will receive an analysis report on the information held in the database every three months and the information to be sent to standing committees every month.

8.3 A quarterly report will be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee via the Audit Panel. Standing committees will receive a similar report relating to their area of responsibility.

**9.0 Guidelines**

9.1 The application of this Policy and associated papers is supported by Guidelines.

**10.00 Effective Date**

10.1 The effective date of this policy is 1 January 2009.

**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 5 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 provided committee approval has been given.
- 4.5 Business lounge access must be approved by committee. This may be purchased if available when there is a stopover of more than two hours 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. It may be more cost effective to leave the car at home/work and take a taxi to the airport or station.

- 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. Where an employee used an ATM to obtain foreign currency then the cost of using the ATM may be claimed as part of subsistence.
- 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 January 2009.

*APPENDIX A*

**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](mailto:smithd@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX 2

### 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 is detailed in Appendix I. The rates 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.
- ATM charges if supported by confirmation of the charge e.g. copy of bank statement, credit card statement, 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 3**

#### **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)
- The duration of the event attended
- 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 Committee approved the revised Staff Travel Policy and agreed that it be implemented with effect from 1st January, 2009.

### 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 (RPA) process is starting to pick up pace. Legislation is now being drafted, delivery structures established and active consideration being given to the transitional arrangements to be put in place to support local government reform within Northern Ireland. Members will note that there have been a number of developments in regard to the RPA since the last update provided to Committee at its meeting in September 2008.

#### **2.0 Key Issues**

- 2.1 Members will accept that the challenge ahead cannot be underestimated and ensuring that the Council is engaged within the process is paramount to ensuring that the best interests of the citizen, the Council and wider local government sector is pursued throughout the process.

**2.2 Update on Strategic Leadership Board**

**2.2.1** The RPA Strategic Leadership Board last met on 3rd October 2008. The work of the Policy Development Panels had been discussed and the Project Initiation Documents for each PDP presented for approval.

**2.3 Update on Policy Development Panels**

**2.3.1** The three Policy Development Panels are now been established and meeting on a regular basis to discuss issues in regard to governance, community planning, central-local government relations, service delivery and structural reform. It is important to note that the Council is actively engaged, at both elected Member and officer level, within each of the PDPs and inform the ongoing debate and discussions.

**2.3.2** PDP A (Governance, Community Planning, Central-Local Government Relations) are currently developing proposals on high level governance arrangements for the new Councils including considering issues in relation to decision-making structures, proportionality, standards, codes of conduct, oversight and transparency. PDP A is also developing proposals for the introduction of a Council led community planning process which will draw upon the experience and lessons learnt from other jurisdictions. In addition, the issue of the future relationship between central and local government within Northern Ireland is being considered by PDP A.

**2.3.3** As part of its work, PDP B (Service Delivery) is developing a draft Customer Service strategy, draft IS Strategy and will be examining the potential requirements for an appropriate Performance Management Strategy. A series of sub-groups have been established to take these issues forward and, again, the Council is actively engaged within these groups to ensure, as is reasonably possible, alignment with the Councils own improvement activities.

**2.3.4** PDP C (Structural Reform) has established 4 sub-groups to take forward issues in relation to Human Resources; capacity building; finance and estates; regional and sub-regional design. Consideration of the transfer of functions will be taken forward by PDP C.

2.3.5 It would be the intention that the proposals emerging from the PDPs will be combined into a consultation document expected to be issued in Spring 2009. In the interim, Members will kept updated on emerging proposals and political direction sought on the key issues.

#### 2.4 *Transitional Arrangements*

2.4.1 At the 3rd October meeting of the RPA Strategic Leadership Board (SLB), the Joint NILGA/DoE Secretariat presented a discussion paper outlining both the pro's and con's of introducing a 'Shadow Period'. The alternative is to form Statutory Transition Committees with the powers to make decisions and lay the necessary foundations prior to the new elected Councils assuming power. The Transition Committees would be supported by a Transition Management Team which comprising of a representative balance of the senior management team of the merging Councils.

2.4.2 To date, the Environment Minister has been minded to introduce Statutory Transition Committees, however, following discussions at the RPA SLB meeting on 3rd October regarding the potential introduction of Shadow Councils; the Minister is actively re-examining his position regarding transitional arrangements. The question of whether a transition period takes place before or after the new Councils being elected is also under considered by the Minister and the SLB. It is anticipated that the Minister will provide further clarity on transitional arrangements by the end of October / early November.

2.4.3 If agreed, the establishment of Statutory Transitional Committees would require legislation changes. It is intended that this would be taken forward under the auspices of the Local Government (Contracts) Bill to be introduced in July 2009.

#### 2.5 *Belfast as a 'Continuing Authority'*

2.5.1 Belfast City Council will be one of few local government bodies that will provide a degree of continuity through the RPA process. In fact, the recent recommendations published by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Mr Dick McKenzie CB, regarding the proposed new Local Government District Boundaries would only result in a 20% increase in the population and geographical scale of Belfast. Under the proposals the Belfast electorate will increase by 32,000 (20%), making a total electorate of 190,000 and bringing the population of the City up to 318,000 (a separate report on the Review of Local

Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland will be discussed next on the agenda). Furthermore, the proposed transfer of additional functions to local government would result in a less than 20% increase in the Council's budget.

2.5.2 Accordingly, whilst the Council recognises the need for transitional arrangements to be established to support orderly conversion to the new local government structure within Northern Ireland, for the process of managing change, there may be a case for Belfast to be designated as a 'Continuing Authority' and be given responsibility for establishing and managing its own transition process.

2.5.3 Members will note that a position paper is currently being prepared which will set out proposals, for Members consideration, regarding the feasibility of Belfast City Council being designated as a 'Continuing Authority' and the potential implications for the Council in terms of the transition process. A detailed report will be submitted, for the consideration of Members, to the November Committee meeting.

## 2.6 *Regional Implementation Co-ordinating Group*

2.6.1 A Regional Implementation Co-ordinating Group will be established to support the RPA transitional process. This Group will provide advice and detailed guidance to the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and Transitional Committees (if established) on implementation and transitional matters.

2.6.2 It is proposed that the group would be chaired by Paul Simpson, the Deputy Secretary of the DOE, and comprise of senior officials from transferring function Departments, 3 local government Chief Executives and a number of other key officials as required e.g. Local Government Staff Commission, NILGA etc.

2.6.3 Members will note that SOLACE has nominated Belfast City Council as one of the 3 local government Chief Executives to be represented on this group.

## 2.7 *Resources*

2.7.1 Resourcing the local government structural reform process has been identified as a priority area by the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and consideration of the issue is being taken forward by Policy Development Panel C 'Structural Reform' through the development of a strategic

business case. An assignment brief is currently being finalised to employ consultants to assist with the development of this work with a deadline for reporting back set for 31st March 2009.

2.7.2 Members will note that PriceWaterhouseCoopers, as part of the report “Practical Approach to the Implementation of Successful Change Programme in Local Government” prepared for SOLACE (a copy of which had been circulated previously to Members at Committee in September), estimated that the transitional implementation structures could cost in excess of £4-£8million.

2.8 **Statement of Principles to underpin the transfer of functions**

2.8.1 The Statement of Principles developed by NILGA, supported by officials from Belfast City Council, has been endorsed by the Strategic Leadership Board and subsequently the Environment Minister has written to Ministerial colleagues to request that they agree to apply the principles in considering the transfer of functions to local government.

2.9 ***Severance Scheme for Elected members and Co-Option***

2.9.1 The National Association of Councillors met recently with the Environment Minister to lobby for a severance package for councillors to be made available in 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 which is to be brought in by July 2009 rather than the Local Government (Finance) Bill.

2.9.2 The Minister has indicated that the details of a proposed severance scheme for Councillors will be issued for consultation by the end of the year. The Minister has also indicated that the Secretary of State will introduce legislation allowing co-option onto Councils simultaneously to the enactment of the severance scheme legislation.

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”**

After discussion, during which the Chief Executive assured the Members that detailed reports in relation to the transitional arrangements would be submitted to the Committee for its consideration in due course, the Committee noted the contents of the report.

#### **Review of Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland**

The Committee was reminded that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner had, on 18th September, released his recommendations on the proposed new 11 Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland. The number of wards, and therefore Councillors, in each District would be 40, with the exception of Belfast which would have 60. The total number of Councillors would be 460, which represented a reduction of 122.

The Commissioner had recommended that the boundary of the Belfast City Council Local Government District should reflect the City's natural setting within the surrounding hills, a number of landscape features and several major roads. He had proposed that:

- 9 localities – Gilnahirk, Tullycarnet, Braniel, Castlereagh, Merok, Cregagh, Wynchurch, Glencregagh and Belvoir – be transferred from the current Castlereagh Borough Council area into Belfast;
- 6 localities – Colin Glen, Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook, Kilwee and Dunmurray – be transferred from the existing Lisburn City Council area into Belfast; and
- 1 small area of housing at Knocknagoney be transferred from the existing North Down Borough Council area to Belfast.

Those changes would increase the population of the City to 318,000, with the eligible electorate rising by 32,000 to 190,000.

The Commissioner was seeking views on all aspects of his provisional recommendations, including the boundaries and the names of the new Local Government Districts and the number, boundaries and names of the wards making up each District. Written comments were being sought by 12th November. Following that there would be a series of public hearings in each of the new Local Government Districts, with the Belfast hearings scheduled for 20th and 21st November in Malone House commencing at 10.00 a.m. Thereafter the Commissioner would submit his final recommendations to the Department of the Environment by June, 2009. Those would then be laid before the Assembly for approval.

In addition to the obvious political issues relating to the revised Local Government Boundaries, there were other issues which would have to be considered:

- the resource implications for services such as refuse collection and street cleansing;
- the potential significant increase in the Council's demographic profile in terms of Targeting Social Needs areas; and
- the impact on leisure provision.

Whilst it was certain that there would be significant financial implications arising from the expansion of the boundary of the City in terms of potential impact on its rate base, both domestic and commercial, that impact had not as yet been quantified. Any consideration of the impact of the proposed changes to the City's boundary would need to be set within the context of the expansion of Council services into the merging areas and the potential requirement for new facilities. Furthermore, the reconfiguration of the Local Government Boundaries might result in the Council taking ownership of additional areas of open space and/or facilities, for example, community and leisure. Again, an assessment would need to be undertaken to identify such facilities, examine fitness for purpose and to quantify the potential capital/revenue implications for the Council. Such consideration would be taken forward within the context of the Council's ongoing work in regard to the rates and the continued engagement within the wider Review of Public Administration process. Further reports would be submitted for the consideration of the Committee in due course.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that responses to the Commissioner's provisional recommendations be left to the individual Political Parties.

### **Northern Ireland Local Government Association - Update**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 19th September, it had agreed that a report providing details on the current position of the Local Government Association and what its expected position and influence would be post-Review of Public Administration be submitted to the Committee for its consideration.

The Director of Core Improvement reported that the Association was firmly established within the decision-making process and implementation structures which had been established to take forward the Review of Public Administration process. The Association facilitated the nomination process for the Review's Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels and provided Joint Secretariat support, alongside officials of the Department of the Environment, to those structures. The Joint Secretariat was contributing also to the development of policy and discussion papers which were being submitted to the aforementioned Board and Panels for consideration. In addition, the Association had established an internal Review of Public Administration Working Group on which the Council was represented.

Whilst it was important to recognise that the Association was one key component in supporting the Review of Public Administration, Local Authorities, at both Elected Member and officer level, were a constituent part of the process and it was important that the implementation of the Review was owned by the whole sector. Therefore, it was suggested that the Council could use its strengthened role within the Association's Executive and its direct Member and officer interface with the Association to further reinforce its engagement and overall influence within the Review of Public Administration process. The establishment of a more formalised link between the Association and the Council and a structured approach to liaison between both parties would enable the Council to inform the ongoing agenda in terms of planning and policy development within the Association. Such advice provided by the Council to the Association would benefit the wider Local Government sector, particularly in the context of the Review of Public Administration process.

The Association had taken also a leading role in advocating on behalf of the Local Government sector and in co-ordinating the development of sectoral position papers on key policy areas including the Review of Public Administration, Local Government modernisation, European affairs, health and environmental issues, planning and e-government. The Association had established a series of working groups to take forward detailed consideration of those important issues and the Council had been engaged within that process. With a view to enhancing its capacity, the Association had strengthened recently its senior management team with the appointment of a Director of Improvement, a Director of Policy and Strategy and a Director of Communications. These posts had been funded by the Department of the Environment.

The Committee was advised that, while the future role and remit of the Association post-Review of Public Administration was somewhat uncertain at this stage, the Association itself had indicated that it would be subject to review in the lead up to the new Local Government structures to be put in place in 2011. This was being considered within the context of the ongoing discussions at the Review of Public Administration's Policy Development Panel A, which was reviewing the future of central/local government relations within Northern Ireland. The Panel was reviewing currently the Welsh Local Government Association model as part of that process. The Council had documented previously the need for a remodelled Association which was highly-attuned, responsive and accountable to its member Councils and which provided a coherent single voice for the Local Government Sector within Northern Ireland. Within the context of a smaller number of Councils post 2011, there was a real opportunity to develop a more focused and effective role for the Association as the representative voice of Local Government.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that, if changes were being made to the Council's current membership on the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and/or its working groups, these be reported to the meeting of the Council scheduled to be held on 3rd November.



**Corporate Plan and Performance Management**

**Best Value Performance Indicators 2007/2008**

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing details in relation to the Council's Best Value Performance Indicators for the period 2007/2008 and approved their submission to the Department of the Environment, Local Government Division.

**Democratic Services and Governance**

**National Association of Councillors – Annual  
General Meeting and Conference**

The Committee was advised that the National Association of Councillors was holding its Annual General Meeting and Conference in Lytham St Annes from 14th till 16th November. The theme of this year's conference was "Improving Services – Delivering Best Practice". The conference would consider the ongoing challenge to continuously improving public services to meet rising citizen expectations. 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 that it provided 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.

It was recommended that the Committee authorise the attendance at the Annual General Meeting and 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 the appropriate travelling and subsistence allowances in connection therewith.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

**Requests for the Use of the City Hall  
and the Provision of Civic Hospitality**

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

<b>“Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
The Law Society of Northern Ireland	The Law Society of Northern Ireland Council Dinner  1st October, 2010  Approximately 300 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 provide an opportunity for representatives from the judiciary, business, voluntary and community sectors to come together to acknowledge the achievements of the society. The event aims to highlight best practice and to develop relations with key stakeholders.  This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £1,500  Approximate budget remaining £168,560
Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Queen's University Belfast	Frank Pantridge's Legacy: A Symposium  11th June, 2009  Approximately 200 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	It is estimated that 100 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks.  Approximate cost £800  Approximate budget remaining £167,730”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Finance**

**Minutes of Meeting of Audit Panel**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel which had been held on 29th September.

The Members noted that a review of the new Governance arrangements which had been introduced on 1st June, 2007 would be submitted for the Committee's consideration in spring, 2009.

### **Authority to Seek Tenders**

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

- (i) the provision of a minibus/coach hire service for the period 1st March, 2009 till 28th February 2010, with the option to renew for a further two years. The projected costs of the service were £75,000 per annum;
- (ii) a five-year lease for three high speed digital printer/photocopiers, the estimated total cost of which would be £198,000, including support for the period;
- (iii) the installation of air conditioning at 22-38 Gloucester Street, at an estimated cost of £60,000;
- (iv) the provision of network cabling services for a two-year period, with an option to renew for a further year. The estimated cost of the cabling contract would be £60,000 per annum; and
- (v) a new framework agreement for the supply of core and edge network equipment and its associated maintenance and support for a three-year period. The nominal value of the contract to be let over three years would be £150,000.

The Committee noted that the tenders would be evaluated using pre-determined criteria.

### **Human Resources**

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

### **Absence Management - Second Quarter 2008/09**

The Committee was advised that absenteeism for the period from July till September, 2008 was showing an average of 2.79 days lost per employee, which was equivalent to the previous quarter. It represented a decrease of 1.09 days per employee for the same period in the previous year, when the figure had been 3.88 days. This meant that the Council was on target to meet its two day target reduction by 2010/11. It was pointed out that 75.72% of staff had had no absence during quarter two, with the number of staff with long-term sickness absence having reduced from 7.99% at the same time last year to 5.10%.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### **National Pay Negotiations**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd August, it had been advised that the National Employers Organisation, UNISON and Unite would be entering into further negotiations with the aim of securing an agreed employment package to resolve the ongoing pay dispute.

The Acting Head of Human Resources reported that, following talks which had been planned after the industrial action of 16th and 17th July, the Trades Union side had referred the matter of the ongoing pay dispute to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service for arbitration. This was provided for in the National Joint Council National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service which stated that “in the event of a dispute over terms and conditions of employment arising between the two Sides of the Council the dispute shall, if requested by either Side, be referred for settlement by arbitration”.

She explained that, in the first instance, arbitration would take the form of written submissions, with a subsequent arbitration hearing. Thereafter, the arbitrator would advise both sides of the settlement to be awarded. The typical timeframe for such an exercise was between two and three months. However, both sides had indicated informally that they would hope to conclude the arbitration by December, 2008. She pointed out that the aforementioned National Agreement stated also that “the arbitration award shall be accepted by both Sides and shall be treated as though it were an agreement between the two Sides”. Consequently there could be no further industrial action on the issue.

Noted.

### **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.

### **Consultation Response –** **Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership** **and Contributions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008** **Local Government Pension Scheme (Administration)** **Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008** **Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional Provision)** **Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008**

The Committee was advised that the Department of the Environment was seeking responses to its consultation exercise in respect of the above-mentioned pension regulations. The Director of Corporate Services recommended that the following comments be submitted as the Council’s response in this regard:

**“Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above proposed regulations. It is a fact that people are living longer and consequently former employees are drawing benefits for longer periods than before. The proposed changes to local government staff pensions and regulations are therefore both needed and necessary. There must be a modern scheme that is affordable, viable, and fit for the 21st century.**

**The key aspect of the proposed regulations is to make sure that the pension scheme is sustainable in the long term, provides a good deal for Council ratepayers, and makes sure that local government continues to be an attractive place to work for both current and future employees. Notwithstanding, there are some issues that the Department of the Environment might wish to consider before making the regulations.**

- There are three sets of regulations out for consultation requiring cross referencing for some elements of the proposals. It would be preferable to produce one set of regulations for ease of management and understanding.**
- Seven new contribution rates are being introduced for employees and this will result in a significant administration burden for employers, scheme administrators as well as presenting some inequities. It would be preferable to determine one common contribution rate for all participants calculated on an average rate, which is understood to be circa 6.3%. Additionally, some discretions are provided for employers to exercise and it is considered this may well result in wide variations within schemes given the number of employers. This is not viewed as desirable and may well lead to future difficulties for employers.**
- New ill-health arrangements are proposed introducing a 3-tier system. It is believed these proposals are unworkable as has been demonstrated in England. It would appear to be perverse to introduce any such new arrangements given they will not work.**
- Revisions to amend the application of Flexible Retirement arrangements so that part of a member’s benefits can be paid require clarification before they can be implemented.**
- Proposals to revise the age at which benefits can be accessed from 50 to 55 is unhelpful at this time given it will limit scope for managing the transition of a small number of employees through the RPA process. It would**

be preferable if this could be deferred to facilitate RPA transition work. It may be that the relevant Compensation Regulations could be modified to mitigate the negative impact of this age revision.”

The Committee approved the proposed response.

### Asset Management

#### Council Meetings in the City Hall – Temporary Arrangements

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### “Relevant Background Information

Council agreed that the refurbishment work to City Hall would take place in two phases. Phase 1 would be the availability of the main civic rooms ie the Council Chamber, Reception Room, Banqueting Hall, Great Hall, Rotunda and associated access and amenity in the form of stairway lift and restrooms. That target has now been achieved although access to the building will only be available from the front.

#### Key Information

Phase 1 will be complete by 19 November 2008 meaning the Council Chamber will be available for the Council meeting from December 2008, although the Committee rooms and Party rooms will not be available until phase 2 in the Summer.

As phase 2 of the construction programme will be ongoing until Summer 2009 a number of temporary arrangements will need to be put in place for Members to hold Council meetings in City Hall from December onwards. Restrictions that will necessarily apply are outlined below:

The Civic Rooms – as stated the main rooms and access to them will be available from 19 November 2008. There will be heating and lighting, toilets available in the East entrance and lift and stair access.

What will not be available are any phone or data links and there will be no arts or artefacts displayed in the rooms.

Catering – Facilities Management can provide a cold buffet service as they do presently with the Reception Room made available for dining or if required hot food can made available. Alternatively, if Members wish, catering could be provided in CWB although that would mean Members having to walk around to the front of City Hall to access the building.

**Pre Council Party Meetings** – space can be made available for Party Groups to hold Pre Council meetings in the main civic rooms by partitioning some space eg in the Banqueting Room or Great Hall. Please note, however, any Party Groups who wish to meet in City Hall rooms will have fairly basic furniture such as round dining tables and stacking chairs.

The alternative to this ad hoc arrangement is to meet first in Adelaide Exchange and then transfer to City Hall for the Council meeting.

**Car Parking** – Car parking at City Hall will be very limited with at most 10-14 spaces available at the East and Front entrances. Again the main alternative is to park in Adelaide Exchange and walk to City Hall although there is free on street parking in Linenhall Street etc from 6.00pm.

Members views are sought on allocation of any available City Hall spaces. Please note the courtyard is the contractors compound and will be the last part of the contract to be completed.

**December Issues** – In addition to the above arrangements the December meeting has an added difficulty in that the Continental Market which will be occupying the front lawn. Members will have to access the building via the market, although Facilities Management will maintain sufficient security to manage any issues from the public seeking to also access the building.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to consider:

1. Whether monthly Council meetings should be held in City Hall from December onwards
2. If so, Members preference in terms of catering, ie City Hall or CWB or Adelaide Exchange
3. The preferred location for pre meetings
4. The question of the limited car parking availability
5. The question of the restricted access because of the impact of the Continental Market in December”

After discussion, the Committee determined not to hold the Council meeting in the City Hall in December but agreed to give further consideration to the matter at its January meeting.

### **City Hall Major Works - Update**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update in relation to the major works which were being undertaken at the City Hall and agreed that a site visit of the building be undertaken after the completion of phase 1 of the works on 19th November.

In this regard the Members directed that all information being submitted to Committee to assist in decision-making be produced in a clear and readable format.

### **Estates Issues**

#### **Former Grove Leisure Centre**

The Committee was informed that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 14th February, had recommended that, upon closure of the former Grove Leisure Centre, the site be transferred to the Corporate Land Bank for disposal in accordance with Council procedures. That decision had been ratified by the Council, at its meeting on 3rd March, subject to officers investigating the future use to which the site could be put in order to maximise the benefits to the local community.

In accordance with Standing Order 60, the Committee noted the appropriation of the premises and noted also that a further report regarding options for the future use of the site would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

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

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 19th September, it had approved the disposal of Fox's Lodge, which fronted the Whiterock Road at the City Cemetery, with the Development Brief to be submitted to the Committee for consideration. Accordingly, the Director of Core Improvement submitted a report in this regard.

During discussion in the matter, a Member suggested that the Brief should be amended to provide that an option be included which might allow the Lodge to be developed in a manner in which it could be used to reflect the history of the cemetery.

The Director of Development pointed out that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee had agreed to the disposal on the grounds that the site should be developed as a self-contained entity. Accordingly, if the Committee were minded to alter the conditions of disposal the matter would need to be referred back to the Parks and Leisure Committee, which now had responsibility for the City cemetery, to seek its views thereon.

The Committee agreed to this course of action.

#### **Wayleave at Shaftesbury Recreation Centre**

The Committee was informed that a request had been received from Doran Consulting, Consulting Engineers, seeking permission to provide a wayleave across Council-owned land for a proposed new storm sewer to serve a planned new pitch on the Shaftesbury Recreation Centre site. The length of the sewer on the land was 4.5 metres and the width of the wayleave being sought was 9 metres. The Council currently leased



the centre to the Lower Ormeau and Markets Community Forum on a ten-year lease from 1st October, 2000. The leased land presently fell under the operational control of Community Services and the Development Committee. The proposed wayleave was across land which formed part of the Parks and Cemeteries Services land known as River Terrace and fell under the operational control of the Parks and Leisure Committee.

The Committee granted approval for the provision of a storm sewer wayleave, at no cost to the Lower Ormeau and Markets Community Forum, in order to facilitate the development of a proposed new pitch on land leased to it by the Council, the wayleave to be on terms agreed by the Estates Manager and incorporated into an appropriate legal agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services.

### **Request for the use of City Hall Grounds**

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

The Committee was advised that a request had been received for the use of the City Hall east lawn for a Festival of Fools event to take place from 1st till 5th May. The event would be a high quality maze installation entitled "Get Lost". The Committee had, in 2007, refused a previous request to host the event. However, granting authority for the event could assist in the important task of keeping the City Hall in the public eye during the period of closure and might therefore be worth considering again.

The organisers had provided assurances in principle in respect of the following key issues:

- an appropriate level of indemnity in respect of loss, damage or personal injury would be provided to the Council;
- the impact on the normal operation of the grounds would be minimal;
- all incidental costs associated with the event, including additional stewarding and security costs, would be borne by the organisers;
- the signage used for the event would have due regard to the status of the City Hall as the political and administrative headquarters of the Council; and
- the lawn would be kept intact as far as possible and re-turfed if necessary.

The Committee agreed to accede to the request.

### **Good Relations and Equality**

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

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership of 10th October.

In considering the minutes, the Committee noted and/or confirmed the following:

### **Interface/Peace Walls**

In accordance with a Notice of Motion, which had been passed by the Council, at its meeting on 3rd March, in regard to the reductions and ultimate removal of the so called "Peace Walls" and barriers which divided the City, a major piece of research on interfaces had been undertaken. In addition, a further audit/mapping exercise of the groups or organisations working in interface areas, to be funded from the Peace III Programme, had been commissioned by the Good Relations Unit.

### **Peace III Small Grants Programme**

The Committee adopted the decision of the Good Relations Partnership in so far as it related to the approval of the criteria and application process for the small grants element of the Peace III Programme.

### **Cross-Cutting Issues**

#### **Fuel Stamps Scheme**

(Ms. S. Wylie, Head of Environmental Health, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"Relevant Background Information"**

The officer group facilitating the All Party Reference Group on Older People has developed an action plan around the delivery of council services to older people. The plan is designed to facilitate a one council approach by both building on existing services and, where possible, identifying new or innovative ways of meeting the needs of older people.

One of the principal areas of concern is fuel poverty and the impact that it has on older people in particular. A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use.

The 2006 House Condition Survey has reported fuel poverty in Belfast at 38.5% of households, however, recent fuel price rises are likely to have increased this figure significantly. The survey also confirms that older people, and lone older people in particular, are most likely to be in fuel poverty.

Some district councils in Northern Ireland currently operate 'Fuel Stamps' schemes for domestic heating oil users. These schemes are designed to help people who are in, or are close to, fuel poverty to better manage their fuel costs. Whilst such a scheme will not reduce

**fuel poverty it can ensure that people who are struggling to budget for everyday living are encouraged to set money aside to help with their heating costs.**

**It is a relatively simple procedure whereby members of the public are given a card, on request, and they can then buy stamps (e.g. at £5 each) which they stick on the card and are able to build up credit that will be accepted by specific participating oil companies towards their fuel bills. The scheme is facilitated principally by participating retail outlets but can also be supplemented by Council staff located in public buildings, such as leisure centres.**

**The scheme utilises a savings method that would be very familiar to older people and therefore one they are more likely to feel comfortable with. The experience of other district councils operating similar schemes is that they are very popular.**

**A fuel stamps scheme operating across the Belfast City Council area would be of a significantly greater magnitude than any of the existing council schemes. In order therefore to measure its feasibility and the potential resource implications of a comprehensive scheme it would be necessary to apply a pragmatic and manageable approach in the first instance by piloting it in a defined area of the city. Currently the Council is represented on the North and West Belfast, Investing for Health, Fuel Poverty Community of Interest (COI). As part of its action plan the COI has been delivering a pilot project in North Belfast which is designed to target fuel poverty through energy efficiency programmes, grants, community development and communication. The Council has already demonstrated its support for the project with a £5,000 contribution (Health and Environmental Services Committee of 5th December 2005). The project is delivered by National Energy Agency (NEA) and its Chief Executive has confirmed that it would be keen to facilitate the Council in identifying retail outlets and distributing cards and stamps.**

#### **Key Issues**

- Belfast City Council is committed to addressing issues affecting older people.**
- Over 38% of households in Belfast are in fuel poverty with older people the most affected.**
- Rising fuel costs continue to increase the number of households affected.**
- Fuel stamps schemes operate successfully in a number of district councils and are very popular with the public.**

- The scheme provides a savings approach that is familiar to many older people.
- Belfast City Council has been offered tangible support from NEA to roll out a pilot fuel stamps project.
- Whilst the pilot could be accommodated within existing budgets it is anticipated that additional resource would be required to operate the scheme across the city.

The vires for incurring expenditure for this pilot and any subsequent roll out would be under section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, if, in the opinion of the Committee, the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to the inhabitants of the district, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefits so accruing would be commensurate with the payments to be made.

#### Resource Implications

These are mostly associated with printing and administration costs

- 20,000 stamps - £4845 (includes set up costs)
- 1,000 cards and 1,000 flyers - £650
- Design costs £600
- Administrative costs for pilot would be met from within existing budgets
- Operational and administrative costs for roll out to be identified through the pilot and a further report brought back to Committee
- Officers are continuing to seek additional funding streams

#### Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee agrees to the piloting of a 'Fuel Stamps' scheme by the Council, in partnership with NEA, with a view to rolling it out across the city and that it approves expenditure on this project under section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

#### Key to Abbreviations

NEA – National Energy Agency”

After discussion, during which the costs associated with the operation of such a scheme and other issues were raised, the Committee adopted the recommendation and noted that a review of the pilot scheme would be undertaken after the winter period.

### **Sustainable Development Action Plan Year 2 Annual Report**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update in relation to Year 2 of the Sustainable Development Action Plan 2006-2009.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th May, 2007, it had approved the establishment of a pilot cycle-to-work scheme. The pilot had been based on a Department of Transport initiative which provided a tax exempt loan scheme for employees to purchase cycles and related safety equipment up to a value of £1,000. The main condition of the scheme was that cycles would be used for the most part for travel to work. The Committee was advised that the pilot had proved to be very successful with the number of target participants having been exceeded significantly. Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee agree that the cycle-to-work scheme be operated on a permanent basis.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Consultation Response: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – New Directions**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

##### **Purpose**

To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee details of a consultation by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – New Directions: A conversation on the future delivery of health and social care services in Belfast. The Belfast Trust has started a process to examine how it will deliver services in the future and this consultation details the initial overview of the strategic direction for services. The consultation runs from 29th August 2008 to 7th November 2008.

##### **Background**

On the 22nd November 2005, the previous Minister for Health, Shaun Woodward announced the largest reform to health and social services in Northern Ireland. The plans included:

- A considerably smaller Government Department;

- A Strategic Health and Social Services Authority to replace the four boards and take on some functions currently with the Department;
- Eighteen Trusts reduced to five by April 2007 (the Ambulance Service remains as a separate Trust);
- Seven local commissioning bodies, demand led by patients and driven by GPs and primary care professionals, taking on some roles from the four boards and some roles from the 15 Local Health and Social Care Groups, which will be abolished;
- One Patient and Client Council replacing the existing four Health and Social Services Councils.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust was formed in April 2007 from the merging of six Trusts, four of which were acute, as part of the Review of Public Administration reforms. The new Trust is responsible for a full range of services, removing the distinction between acute, community and mixed Trusts. It was intended that the new Trusts would promote integration between health and social services, across professional groupings and across geographical areas; the networking of services would be at the core of this.

#### Summary of the Consultation

The consultation document outlines the guiding principles that will steer the Trust's approach to reviewing and reorganising services. The Trust is generally seeking feedback around the guiding principles and the proposed models of care that might be implemented.

The key principles outlined in the consultation documentation for comment under the following headings:-

#### 1. Guiding Principles

- Improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities
- Focus on prevention of illness, early assessment and intervention
- Focus on individual needs and choices
- Provide safe, high quality, effective care

- **Improve accessibility to services – promote equity and welcome diversity**
  - **Localise where possible, centralise where necessary**
  - **Integrate services (through partnerships working)**
  - **Provide clear directions to services, reducing fragmented and frustrating services**
  - **Maximise utilisation of assets**
- 2. Proposals for modernisation and reform of services**
- **Following discussions within the Trust, proposed models of care have been outlined and set within DHSS policy decisions and PFG**
- 3. How do I get access to community health and social care services?**
- **A network of seven wellbeing and treatment centres, intended to be single access points for information, advice and services**
- 4. Where do I go if I am having a baby?**
- **Central to the delivery of the Trust’s Maternity Services are Choice, Continuity and Control. The Belfast Trust’s model of care favours a holistic, community based model of maternity care which incorporates a wide range of services in a variety of settings including the women’s own home (community midwifery teams), Wellbeing and Treatment Centres, a midwife led unit (at the Mater Hospital) and a single inpatient obstetrics unit (On the Royal Hospitals site).**
- 5. Where do I go if I need to access services for children?**
- **The Trust favours a model of care which incorporates a wide range of services to children in a variety of child focused settings. The Trust is committed to providing high quality assessment and treatment and intervention across the continuum of care.**
- 6. Where do I go if I need support or care because of my physical or sensory disability?**
- **The Trust favours a model of care that continues to provide a range of specialist rehabilitation services on a single site, Musgrave Park Hospital. The Trust’s services**

plan is that people with physical or sensory disability should be supported to live as independently as possible in the community.

7. Where do I go if I need support because I have a learning disability?
  - The Trust will continue to provide inpatient assessment and treatment services (however after 2016 Muckamore Abbey Hospital will not be a home for life for people with a learning disability). The Trust will develop, in partnership with other agencies, homes for life in the community and to expand the availability of small respite units and develop a small number of community treatment beds for people in Belfast. The Trust also plans to develop new day service accommodation for people with complex needs and challenging behaviour.
8. Where do I go if I am an adult and need mental health services or I have an acute mental illness?
  - The Trust's strategy is to provide a modern, responsive mental health service in a range of settings with the aim of moving away from hospital-based models of services to early intervention and community support. While the Trust currently provides acute inpatient mental health services at Belfast City Hospital, the Mater Hospital and Knockbracken Healthcare Park, the preference for the future is to develop a single acute inpatient mental health facility for patients that cannot be treated within the home setting.
9. Where do I go if I need acute hospital services?
  - Emergency Services would be retained at the Mater Hospital, Belfast City Hospital and Royal Hospitals. However, there would be differentiation of services to improve patient care, based on the type of patient's condition and needs:
  - Cardiology services would be provided at the Mater Hospital, Belfast City Hospital and Royal Hospitals.
  - The provision of a major acute hospital; encompassing trauma services, emergency services and a heart centre on the Royal Hospitals site.



- The provision of a range of acute hospital services and a Regional Ophthalmic Centre (including a unit for planned eye surgery and treatment) on the Mater Hospital site, as part of a larger ambulatory care centre.
  - The provision of a range of acute hospital services, encompassing cancer and renal services, the chronic admissions centre as well as the major elective centre for Belfast (including an elective orthopaedics unit) on the Belfast City Hospital site.
  - The provision of specialist rehabilitation services on Musgrave Park Hospital site.
10. Where do I go if I need support because I am an older person?
- The Trust's aim is that older people should be maintained in their own homes, supported by a network of care services that enable them to maintain their quality of life.

#### Key Issues

##### Implications for Belfast City Council

##### Guiding Principles

The Trust has set out a draft document for 2008-2013, entitled 'The Belfast Way' which describes the values and objectives for service delivery. Many of the guiding principles, as set out above, reflect the values and direction of Belfast City Council. There is scope, therefore, for the Council to work in partnership with the Trust to improve the health and quality of life for all people living in, or indeed visiting Belfast. The Council is already actively working with the Health Trust and other health organisations to improve well-being and to reduce health inequalities; the vision document therefore recognises and provides an opportunity to build upon this work. In addition, the principles of maximising assets and integrating services through partnership working provides scope for the Council and others throughout the city to contribute to efficient and more customer focussed service delivery. The focus on prevention; promoting equality and diversity; service improvement and local access are all reflected in the strategic work of the Council.

##### Wellbeing Centres

The Trust is proposing to establish a network of seven wellbeing centres, strategically located within the main community sectors across Belfast which are expected to be single points of access for information, advice and services i.e. Four of these centres are open

including the Grove Centre and three more are set to open over the next two years. The Knockbreda Centre will open early in 2009, followed by the Shankill Centre and the West Belfast Centre which are set to open in 2010. Each centre will have dentistry, occupational health, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and may in the future offer outpatient clinics relocated from hospital settings. There is scope for Belfast City Council to work in partnership with the Trust and others to maximise the utilisation of assets, not just within the Trust, but across the city thereby creating economies and more effective and accessible services.

### Modernisation and Reform

The Belfast Trust is planning to centralise mental health services through the provision of a single acute health care facility at Knockbracken Healthcare Park, which will be part of a network of residential, day care and treatment centres provided locally throughout Belfast. The potential closure of acute inpatient mental health facilities at both Belfast City Hospital and the Mater Hospital will have various implications and may potentially mean increased waiting times to be seen by a professional mental health care worker, and the subsequent impact this may have on vulnerable patients. There is no information provided on the level or pattern of usage of services within the two hospitals that are proposed for closure, the current waiting times or of the ability of a single health care facility to absorb the volume of displaced patients.

Acute emergency care will continue in the three hospitals and in future will specialise and differentiate service depending on the patient's needs and condition. Cardiology services will be provided at the Mater Hospital, Belfast City Hospital and the Royal Hospital. The Royal Hospital site will be a major acute hospital encompassing trauma services, emergency services and a heart centre. Belfast City Hospital will provide a range of acute services encompassing cancer and renal services, the chronic admissions centre and the major elective centre for Belfast. The Mater Hospital will provide a range of acute services and a Regional Ophthalmic Centre as part of a larger ambulatory care centre.

Inpatient obstetric services including neonatal services will be on a single site at the Royal Hospital and this will be supported by a midwifery led unit at the Mater Hospital. With the closure of the Jubilee Maternity Unit at Belfast City Hospital and the subsequent merger with the Royal Hospital in January 2001, Belfast has already experienced serious upheaval in maternity care in recent years.

Considering the major changes to service provision for the Belfast area that the Trust have outlined as above, and in order to fully understand the impact that this may have on the city as a whole, much more detailed information would be required. Perhaps even including a detailed impact assessment and further consultation on specific changes.

#### **Partnership Working and Integrated Services**

The guiding principles that are outlined within the consultation are generally aligned with the principles of the Council, particularly in the current corporate plan, to deliver high quality, customer focused services that meet the needs of local people and work towards improving quality of life and well being. In order to be successful in these aims, effective partnership working is crucial. The Council has already proved its willingness to work with the Trust in the successful development of the Grove Wellbeing Centre. In addition, the Council is currently working with the Trust and other partner agencies to ensure that services for older people are appropriate to need and accessible. Furthermore the Trust is keen to work with the Council and other agencies in the care of Children and Young People. The Council has indicated its desire to work with the Trust in the consultation response and the potential role of the Council has been highlighted.

As a result of the Review of Public Administration, Councils have a new wellbeing power. Four Councillors from Belfast City Council will be represented on the Local Commissioning Group and there are plans for local collaborative working arrangements between Councils and the new public health agency

#### **Ongoing Engagement**

The Strategic Policy and Resource Committee were advised of a correspondence received from William McKee, Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust, seeking permission to address the Committee on health issues. As yet, no date has been set for this meeting.

#### **Further Details**

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust welcome all views & comments regarding future access to services.

The consultation document is available at the following website:

[http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/Inews/New\\_Directions.html#TopOfPage](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/Inews/New_Directions.html#TopOfPage)

**All responses should be forwarded to Belfast Health and Social Care Trust by 7th November 2008.**

**Recommendations**

**Members are asked to approve the attached draft response from Belfast City Council and agree its submission to Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.”**

The Committee approved the draft response for submission to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Chairman