

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 12th December, 2008

## MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCann (Deputy Chairman) (in the Chair); and Councillors Adamson, Attwood, W. Browne, Crozier, Lavery, Maginness, A. Maskey, C. Maskey, P. Maskey, Rodway and Smyth.

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

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor D. Dodds) and Councillors M. Browne and Newton.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 14th and 21st November 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 December.

### 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 now entering into the critical stage of implementation whereby primary legislation is being drafted, implementation structures established and active consideration being given to the transitional arrangements to be put in place to support local government reform within Northern Ireland.**

**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.

**RPA Implementation Structures**

**2.2 *Update on Policy Development Panels***

- 2.2.1** Members will note that is intended that the initial proposals emerging from the three Policy Development Panels in regard to the necessary Primary (enabling) Legislation will be submitted for the consideration of the NI Assembly in early 2009 and will subsequently be issued for formal consultation (3 months period).

**2.3 *Regional Transition Coordinating Group***

- 2.3.1** The Regional Transitional Coordinating Group (RTCG) has been established and held its inaugural meeting on Tuesday 25th November 2008. The Group is chaired by Paul Simpson, Deputy Secretary of the DoE with the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council as Vice Chair with membership comprising of senior officers from local government and transferring Departments.

- 2.3.2** The Group will provide the essential interface between the strategic policy direction set by the Strategic Leadership Board and its Policy Development Panels, and the local policy set by the Transition Committees and their operational delivery teams (the Transition Management Teams). It will oversee the management and integration of the implementation stage of the local government reform programme.

- 2.3.4** Initial areas for action proposed by the RTCG was the need for clarity around the detail of the transferring functions and associated resources; the importance of establishing a 'Transfer of Functions Working Group' to consider the details around transfer; the establishment of a Local Government HR Coordinating Group (comprising officers from local government, the Local Government Staff Commission, transferor bodies and Trade Unions) who would advise on regional human resource and staff transfer implementation issues.

**2.4 *Belfast City Council's Transition Committee***

**2.4.1** The Committee agreed, at its meeting on the 14th November 2008, that the Council be recommended to appoint the Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as the Council's RPA Transition Committee, the additional meeting of the Committee be used for the meetings of the Transition Committee and that a letter be forwarded to the Minister with responsibility for the Department of the Environment on this basis. This had been ratified by Council at its meeting on 1st December, 2008.

**2.4.2** Subsequently, the Chief Executive has written to the Environment Minister and relevant central government officials outlining the Council's position in regards to the proposal that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be designated as the Council's RPA Transitional Committee, that that committee comprises of 20 elected Members appointed on the basis of proportionality using D'Hondt and that an additional monthly meeting of the Committee has been designated for the purpose of RPA Transition.

**2.4.3** The Council has also sought for a process of engagement and discussion between relevant Department officials and officers within the Council to develop a draft Terms of Reference for the Transition Committee. Members will note that a further update report will be submitted to Committee, for consideration, on this issue.

**2.4.4** Members will note further that the DoE has indicated that an amount of £150,000 would be made available to each Council to resource the change management implications, staffing and the payment of an additional allowance of £2,700 to each Member who sat on the Transition Committee which would be allocate the payment. It would be the intention that this payment would be allocated within Belfast City Council on the same basis as the allocation of Special Responsibility allowances.

**2.5 *Resourcing RPA Implementation***

**2.5.1** A major issue of concern in moving forward the RPA implementation process is the level and availability of resources necessary to deliver the local government reform process. An implementation plan cannot be realised without appropriate resources are made available to support its delivery

- 2.5.2 Deloitte has been commissioned by the Department of the Environment to develop a strategic outline business case which sets out the resources required to deliver the local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration. Early indications from Deloitte would suggest that there is a need for £60million to support the transition process (e.g. moving from 26-11 Councils with additional functions) and £60million to support the transformation (modernisation) process.
- 2.5.3 NILGA is currently in the process of developing, in partnership with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, a major 'Campaign for Resources' which seeks to ensure that necessary resources are provided by the NI Executive to support the effective implementation of the RPA. Please refer to Appendix 1 for initial proposals around 'Campaign for Resources'.
- 2.5.4 NILGA is seeking to enlist the support of all Council's and elected Members in taking forward this campaign in regards to lobbying on behalf of local government and ensuring a united front is provided on the need to adequately resource the RPA implementation process.

### 3.0 Resource Implications

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

### 4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) note the contents of this report;
- b) agree that the Council be fully supportive of the emerging 'Campaign for Resources' currently being developed.

### Appendix 1

The intention of the RPA launched in 2002 was to review the entire operation of the public sector. At an early stage Local Government indicated that it would not be appropriate for the sector to pay for the local government aspects of the RPA and this has been the stated position for some time.

The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review was originally intended to include a modernisation fund for local government, but this funding was not included in the final budgets. It is understood that the key reason for this is that the bid for resources was not well enough developed at the time. Local Government is now faced with an unprecedented change process, which if critically underfunded will undermine the capacity of the sector to change and to become a key partner with government in enhancing public services. NILGA members have raised this issue at a political level on many occasions.

As agreed at the last Full Executive meeting on Friday 28 November, NILGA will now embark on a major Campaign for Resources, and lobby strategically for the resources needed to support RPA.

**The President asks:**

*That the NILGA RPA Working Group designs a campaign in partnership with SOLACE, to seek to ensure that the Executive provide the necessary resources to ensure the RPA can be effectively delivered in local government.*

Any campaign could include;

- An assessment of the resources required at an essential and desirable level to support delivery to ensure a balanced and professional approach. (Early indications from Deloitte would suggest £60M for transition and £60M for transformation)
- Write to all the Ministers on the Executive and all MLAs
- Organise an awareness raising event at Stormont
- Seek meetings with DFP and the Environment Committees
- Initiate a strategic press campaign on the issue, engaging all the councils to ensure regional coverage
- Provide councils with materials to campaign both in their local press and to lobby their local MLAs.
- Engage the parties - offer to meet with the party councillor associations to advise them on the critical need for funding. (Meet with Party leaders?)

- Request NILGA members and all councillors to lobby their own party hierarchies
- Engage the other local government organisations to ensure a united front is provided on resources”

The Committee agreed to support the emerging campaign which seeks to ensure that adequate resources are provided by the Northern Ireland Executive for the effective implementation of the Review of Public Administration.

### Democratic Services and Governance

#### Extension of Current Council Term

The Committee agreed to defer until its meeting in January consideration of a report in relation of the extension of the current Council term.

#### 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:

<b>“Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Northern Ireland Federation of Townswomens’ Guilds	Luncheon to mark International Women’s Day  3rd March, 2010  Approximately 175 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a luncheon	Belfast City Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity.  This lunch which will mark International Women’s Day seeks to promote the principles of good citizenship and equality for women.  This event contributes to the Council’s Corporate Strategic Objectives of Promoting Civic Leadership and Improving the quality of life now, and for future generations.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a luncheon  Approximate cost £4,500  Approximate budget remaining £159,630

<b>Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
St Colmcille's Guide Unit	Awards Ceremony Dinner  7th October, 2011  Approximately 150 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to acknowledge the role played by the current leaders of the Unit in providing a challenging Guiding programme which aims to enable girls and young women to develop their full potential.  The event will also recognise the commitment and dedication of long serving members.  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 £600  Approximate budget remaining £159,030
Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland	Annual Conference Reception  7th April, 2009  Approximately 140 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	It is estimated that 140 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 £560  Approximate budget remaining £158,470
Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining	Conference Reception  17th March, 2009  Approximately 120 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	It is estimated that 110 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 £480  Approximate budget remaining £157,990"

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**National Association of Councillors –  
Crime and Disorder Conference**

The Committee was advised that the National Association of Councillors would be holding a conference in York from 16th till 18th January, 2009. The theme of the conference was “Tackling Violent Crime and Disorder – Delivering Safer Communities” and would focus on a range of issues faced by local communities which were blighted by criminal and anti-social behaviour and the measures which would need to be put in place to deal effectively with these problems.

It was recommended that the Committee authorise the attendance at the Crime and Disorder 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.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

**Northern Ireland Local Government  
Association - Annual Conference**

The Head of Committee and Members’ Services reported that correspondence had been received from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association advising that its Annual Conference and Local Government Awards would be held in the Armagh City Hotel on 26th and 27th February, 2009. The theme of the Conference was “Serving Citizens – Leading Change” and it would focus on the practical implementation of the Review of Public Administration.

The Committee authorised the attendance at the conference of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council’s representatives on the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, the Chief Executive and the Head of Committee and Members’ Services (or their nominees.)

**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 8th December.

**Update on the Revenue Budget 2008-2009**

The Director of Corporate Services reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 21st November, he had reported that the forecasted year end outturn for the Council was showing an overspend of approximately £850,000. The Committee had agreed that a report recommending specific actions to be taken to address the potential year end overspend be submitted for its consideration at the December meeting.



The Director reported that a cross-Departmental taskforce had been established to tackle the issue of the potential overspend and a number of cost-cutting measures had been identified, including reductions in overtime and agency costs and the delaying of the recruitment of a number of back-office posts. In total, savings of approximately £550,000 had been identified, which would have the effect of reducing the overspend at year end to approximately £300,000.

The Director pointed out that the current volatile economic conditions, which impacted on both income and expenditure for the Council, could result in the forecast changing over the forthcoming months and might require further cost cutting measures to be implemented. Continuous monitoring of the financial situation would be undertaken, with a further report being provided to the Committee in January.

The Committee noted the current financial position and endorsed the actions which had been taken to address the current overspend.

**Request for Funding - City of  
Belfast Youth Orchestra**

(The Acting Head of Corporate Services Directorate attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was advised that a request for financial assistance had been received from the City of Belfast Youth Orchestra in relation to a tour of Italy and Slovenia which would take place in July, 2009. The cost of the tour was estimated at £118,000 and, while members of the orchestra would be paying the majority of the expenses, sponsorship from third parties was being sought.

A legal opinion had been sought and the Council could, if it so wished, use Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to make financial contributions of this nature. The Committee had made similar donations to the City of Belfast Youth Orchestra in the past and most recently for its participation in the Festival of Youth Orchestras in Spain during July, 2007. Accordingly, it was recommended that funding in the sum of £5,000 be awarded to the City of Belfast Youth Orchestra for this purpose.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and

Resolved – That expenditure of £5,000 in respect of the aforementioned tour be approved under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to, the District and the inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefit so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made.

## **District Rates Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

### **“Relevant Background Information**

Members will recall that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee met on 17 October 2008 to discuss a number of rates issues. The purpose of this report is to update Members on a number of developments which have occurred since the October meeting.

### **Key Issues**

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland has issued his audit report on the Statement of Rate Levy and Collection 2006/07. This covers all rate assessments billed and cash collections from ratepayers. In his report the C&AG stated that he could not give any assurance to the Assembly on the assessment and collection of rates for 2006/07 due to significant system control problems which arose following the introduction of a new IT system. His report highlighted numerous problems in relation to checking the accuracy of the figures in the accounts and control failures that impacted on LPS's performance in administering and collecting rates.

Following the issue of the C&AG report, the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee has released its response to the report. The report, 'examines the reasons for the financial and operational difficulties that have overwhelmed Land and Property Services in its assessment, administration and collection of rates.'<sup>1</sup>

Members should note in particular that the Public Accounts Committee has made recommendations in relation to vacant properties, the accuracy of penny product information and the collection of arrears. These are the same issues which were brought to Members attention at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in October. The key recommendation made by the PAC is 'The Committee recommends that revenue forgone and additional costs of collection as a result of the problems with the new system will not be passed on to Councils. The Committee would like an assurance of this from DFP.'

In relation to this recommendation, the council has been informed that LPS intend to write-off £10m of debt in 2009/10. This is likely to result in losses for Belfast in the region of £2.5m in 2009/10. Also, indications are that increases in the cost of collection for 2009/10 will be more than 20%. It is recommended that the council

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<sup>1</sup> Public Accounts Committee Report on Statement of Rate Levy and Collection 2006-07 Para 1

write to the Minister to seek assurances that the increase in cost of collection and debt write-offs are not being passed on to the council in the context of the PAC recommendation.

Members should also be aware that NILGA has issued a press release in relation to rates issues. The President of NILGA has written to the Minister calling on him to implement the recommendation of PAC that 'revenue forgone and additional costs of collection as a result of problems with new systems will not be passed on to Councils'. It is recommended that the Council supports NILGA on this issue.

A worrying development for the Council is that a number of high value non-domestic properties are being re-valued. This may lead to a further reduction in rates income which could be backdated for a number of years. If these reductions are claimed from the Council in one year then they will have to be financed from cuts in expenditure. NILGA has called for the extension of transitional relief arrangements to cover the impact of re-valuations on Councils. It is recommended that the Committee write to the Minister in support of the NILGA position.

Given the seriousness of these issues and their potential negative impact on the EPP 2009/10, Members may also wish to consider whether a request should be made for Council representatives to meet with the Minister to discuss these issues in more detail prior to the setting of the rate for 2009/10.

#### Recommendations

The Committee is requested to agree:

1. to write to the Minister to seek assurances that the likely increase in cost of collection and debt write-offs are not being passed on to the Council in the context of the recommendation 23 of the PAC Report on Statement of Rate Levy and Collection 2006-07.
2. support NILGA's position on transitional relief to cover the impact of backdated re-valuations and calling on the Minister to implement recommendation 23 of the PAC Report on Statement of Rate Levy and Collection 2006-07."

Following discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations contained in the report and instructed the Council's Head of Corporate Communications to prepare for its consideration a report on a communications plan for the 2009/10 rate-setting process

which would help the public to understand that increases in the rate which may become necessary as a result of failures of the Land and Property Services Agency were not being imposed as a result of increased spending on the part of the Council.

### Human Resources

#### Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives

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

The Committee noted the appointments.

### Asset Management

(The Head of Facilities Management attended in connection with this item.)

#### City Hall - Coffee Shop Facility

##### “Relevant background information

At its meeting of 24th October 2008 the Committee authorised the invitation of quotations in respect of the operation of a proposed coffee-shop facility in the City Hall.

Quotations were invited and briefings conducted with respondents in terms of the scale and scope of the proposed facility and the constraints imposed in respect of menus and opening hours etc. Quotations were invited on the basis of (a) the operation of the coffee-shop facility only, and (b) on the basis of the operation of both the coffee-shop and giftware sales. The resulting contract, if any, would run for 1 year with an optional further year at the Council's discretion.

A total of 3 quotations have been received, as follows:-

Mount Charles Catering Ltd: management fee (i.e. the Council to pay the caterer) of £7,500 pa (rising to £7,725 in year 2) in respect of the coffee-shop and giftware franchise;

Posh Nosh: management fee of £12,000 pa for the coffee-shop facility only. No quote for optional 2nd year, and no quote for giftware option; and

**Castle Catering:** franchise fee (i.e. the caterer pays the Council) £11,100 for the coffee-shop option only in Year 1 or £15,100 for the combined coffee-shop and giftware option, rising to £12,100 in Year 2 for the coffee-shop option or £18,100 for the combined coffee-shop & giftware option.

As can be seen from the above, the only respondent offering to pay the Council for the franchise opportunity is *Castle Catering*, which also operates the catering franchises in a number of other Council properties, notably Belfast Castle, Malone House and the new Stables restaurant.

Members should be aware that the initial fit-out costs for the area (including the supply of necessary kitchen equipment etc) is estimated to be in the region of £40,000, and this is not recoverable from the franchisee.

It has also been proposed that the coffee-shop area be 'themed' (one option being the replication of the Café Parisien or Veranda Café originally found on the first-class deck of the Titanic) in order to link better with the enhanced tours of the building agreed by the Committee in November 2008.

Additional costs (estimated to be a further £40,000) will be associated with this work which again is not recoverable from the franchisee.

It should also be noted that, as the franchise is a commercial opportunity, no staff or Member discounts would be available under any of the bids made.

### **Key Issues**

The key issues are therefore as follows:-

- does the Committee wish to proceed with the coffee-shop option;
- does the Committee wish to franchise only the operation of the coffee-shop facility or should the giftware option also be made available (although managed and quality-assured by the Facilities Manager); *and*
- does the Committee wish to incur the additional cost of theming the coffee-shop area and, if so, is the Titanic option acceptable or should other options be pursued?

## **Resources Implications**

### **Financial**

The total cost of fit-out and theming is estimated to be in the region of £80,000, provision for which has been made in the City hall revenue budget for 2009/10. At the highest level of franchise fee offered (i.e. £18,100 p.a.) the pay-back period will be at least 4 years, however the facility will undoubtedly add an extra dimension to the building and enhance its tourist potential.

### **Human Resources**

The staffing of the coffee-shop facility (and receipting of giftware sales if offered) will be the responsibility of the successful franchisee. However in light of the fact that the coffee-shop facility would be open to the public and that the obvious point of entrance/egress is the East Entrance, it would be necessary to provide Security cover in this area from 08:30 -16:30 (Mon-Sat) and this would mean a change to the establishment and current shift patterns of the Security unit.

### **Asset & other implications**

There are no direct asset implications in terms of the fabric of the building or its systems and services.

## **Recommendations & Decisions**

The Committee's direction is sought in terms of the desirability of proceeding with the coffee-shop facility, the potential inclusion of the giftware franchise and the theming or otherwise of the area.

### **Key to Abbreviations**

None."

Following discussion it was

Proposed by Councillor Attwood,  
Seconded by Councillor C. Maskey,

That the Committee agrees to accept the quotation received from Castle Catering, in the sum of £15,100 in year 1 rising to £18,100 in year 2, for the franchise operation of the coffee shop including the sale of giftware and agrees also that it would be appropriate to theme the coffee shop area and accordingly directs that a further report be submitted in relation to the options for theming.

On a vote by show of hands nine Members voted for the proposal and one against and it was accordingly declared carried.

### **Proposed Disposal of Land at Park Road, Mullusk**

In accordance with Standing Order 60, the Committee was notified that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 9th October, had agreed to the disposal of an area of approximately 0.46 acres of land at the City of Belfast playing fields. It was reported that a figure of £16,500 had been agreed between the Estates Manager and the Land and Property Services Agency, acting on behalf of the Roads Service, for this disposal.

### **Proposed Acquisition of Land at the Mary Peters Track**

The Committee was reminded that in 1987 the Queen's University of Belfast had granted the Council a 99 year lease for approximately 36 acres of land at Upper Malone on which the Mary Peters Track was located. At that time, the University had provided the land free of charge to the Council (subject to the payment of a nominal rent of £1 per annum) but with the provision that the property would be available for use free of charge by students and staff of the University. The Committee was advised that, by way of a supplemental lease dated 4th April 1995, an additional small area of approximately 0.168 acres had been incorporated into the site on the same terms and conditions as those contained in the 1987 lease.

The Director of Improvement stated that a recent examination of the Council's title to the land had revealed that an additional small portion of land measuring some 31.27 square metres should have been acquired from the Queen's University of Belfast to provide further frontage land at the main access point to the facilities from Old Coach Road. It would appear that this portion of land had been unintentionally omitted from the 1987 lease and it was proposed to acquire it from the University by way of a further supplemental lease on the same terms as the 1987 lease.

Resolved – That the Committee approves of the acquisition of a small portion of land measuring 31.27 square metres at the entrance to the Mary Peters Track from the Queen's University of Belfast by way of a supplemental lease, at no cost to the Council, on the same terms as the original 1987 lease, subject to the preparation and completion of the appropriate legal documentation.

### **Good Relations and Equality**

(The Good Relations Manager attended in connection with these items.)

### **Good Relations Partnership**

The Committee approved the minutes of the Good Relations Partnership of 5th December and approved the process for the commissioning of projects and the procuring of goods and services under the Peace III Plan.

### **City Hall Memorabilia**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 14th November, it had agreed that during the closure of the City Hall the Council should take the opportunity to rationalise and improve upon the experience offered to visitors undertaking organised tours of the building and, at the same time, work towards achieving a fully balanced and

inclusive display of artefacts and other memorabilia. The Good Relations Manager stated that the Committee had agreed that the six Elected Members representing the Party Groupings on the Good Relations Partnership should act as a cross-Party Reference Group in any future discussions regarding City Hall memorabilia.

She reported that those six Members had met on 5th December to discuss how best to ensure that the future displays at the City Hall were more representative of the history and population of the City. The Group had decided that the most appropriate way forward would be for an article to be included in the City Matters magazine and for information to be placed on the Council's website inviting suggestions from residents of the City as to what should be displayed in the City Hall. Following an analysis of the responses received, it might be necessary to commission a further study.

The Good Relations Manager reported that it was intended that any such study in this regard would require to be completed in a timely manner so that any recommendations could be acted upon in time for the re-opening of the City Hall in the summer of 2009.

Following discussion, the Committee adopted the approach outlined above with regard to the review of memorabilia in the City Hall.

### **Cross-Cutting Issues**

#### **Royal Maternity Hospital Support Campaign**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

##### **“Purpose of the Report**

To provide supplemental advice to the Committee in relation to how the Council might undertake a campaign in support of the provision of a new regional hospital for children and women on the site of the Royal Group of Hospitals.

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

The Committee, at its meeting of 21 November, considered a report submitted by the Director of Legal Services in relation to the question of support for the proposed new regional hospital for children and women. Following a suggestion by a Member that the Council should incur expenditure of an appropriate amount in relation to mounting its own campaign in support of the proposed hospital, and following the contribution of a number of other Members to the discussion, the Director of Legal Services pointed out that any proposal of such a nature could lawfully be implemented by the Council pursuant to the special expenditure powers set out in Section 115 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972. However, he also pointed out that this would be in the context of cross party support for the proposal and he noted that the advice from Counsel had referred to the restriction in the 1972 Act which precludes the use of Section 115 for ‘party political publicity campaigns’.



### Key Issues

It would appear from the general thrust of the discussion at the meeting of the Committee on 21 November, and from a number of subsequent discussions with various individual Members, that a certain amount of support exists across the parties for the proposal to mount some form of campaign in support of the proposed hospital. However, that support does appear to be qualified to the extent that any expenditure to be incurred should be of a reasonably modest nature and on the basis that any resolution by the Council in support of the proposal should attract support on a cross party basis.

If Members are minded to support a cross party resolution that the Council should incur expenditure of a reasonably modest nature in pursuance of a campaign to support the provision of a new regional hospital for women and children on the site of the Royal Group of Hospitals, then such a proposal is legally tenable subject to the following

1. the resolution attracts cross party support
2. the Council agrees the level of expenditure to be incurred, which it is suggested might be in the region of £15-20,000
3. the resolution to incur that expenditure be on the basis that, in accordance with the provisions of Section 115 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972, the Council considers that the expenditure shall be in the interests of, and will bring direct benefit to the Council, its district, and the inhabitants of its district – and that the expenditure to be incurred is considered to be commensurate with the direct benefit to be so achieved.

If the Committee is desirous of proceeding on this basis, and passes a resolution in the appropriate wording, then it is suggested that, for the purpose of taking the matter forward, a Working Group be established comprising of nominated Members from each of the Party Groups for the purpose of agreeing how the approved expenditure should be applied in relation to the proposed campaign of support.

The Committee should also decide if it would be appropriate that the Working Group, if established, should also liaise, for information purposes, with the Royal Maternity Hospital Liaison Group, which the Committee will recall it received a presentation from at its meeting of 22 August 2008.

### **Recommendations**

**It is a matter for the Committee, having considered the foregoing advice, to decide whether it wishes the Council to now undertake its own campaign in support of the proposed hospital, subject to the conditions which have been suggested by the Director of Legal Services.”**

Following a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that:

- (a) expenditure, up to a maximum of £20,000, in respect of the above-mentioned campaign be approved under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to, the District and the inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefit so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made;
- (b) a fixed-term Working Group, comprising one Member from each of the Political Parties represented on the Council, be appointed to consider the most appropriate means of taking forward the campaign; and
- (c) a report on the recommendations of the Working Group in this regard be submitted in due course for the consideration of the Committee.

### **Safer Belfast Plan 2009-2011**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

**Community safety is one of the main concerns of the people of Belfast and hence is an issue of considerable importance to the Elected Representatives. Consequently it is a key element of the *Supporting People and Communities* theme of the new Corporate Plan.**

**Members will be aware that the Council takes the lead role in supporting the Belfast Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which brings together representatives from various agencies and sectors to work collectively on programmes and strategies to improve safety in the City.**

**The Belfast CSP has produced a draft Safer Belfast Plan 2009-2011, which prioritises four main themes, tackling anti-social behaviour, reducing alcohol fuelled violent crime, dealing with hate crime and to help Belfast feel safer. These four priority areas were**

chosen following a review of official data and community consultation in 2007. The consultations included Belfast City Council's public consultation and the safer city research which was commissioned jointly by Belfast CSP and Belfast District Policing Partnership (DPP).

The landscape for the public sector is changing and preparation for community planning is challenging us to develop a more holistic and sustainable approach to developing a Safer Belfast. Therefore the approach adopted this year in developing the 2 year plan has been more ambitious than previous years, the intention being that this new plan represents an overarching plan for a Safer Belfast that all of the partners will work to and be part of. The plan must not only describe the projects and initiatives across Belfast that both the Council and the other 50 participating agencies contribute to but we also want it to provide the framework for all the agencies engaged in this agenda to work towards and this should be reflected in each organisation's corporate plan. We want it to be a stimulus to the agencies working better together and joining up resources to deliver services together in a way that complements each organisation's core business to achieve an overall aim. This could be viewed as the beginning of a 'community planning' approach to creating a safer Belfast.

The Safer Belfast themes are taken forward by interagency, intersectoral city wide thematic groups. The thematic groups assess how we tackle anti-social behaviour, reduce alcohol related crime, deal with hate crime and help Belfast feel safer and develop new interventions and solutions when we need them.

In parallel to the Safer Belfast Plan the Council has also been working *internally* to build the capacity of the Council to lead on the development of a Safer Belfast and provide a *Safer City Framework* for more effective cross Council working. The framework will act as a platform to integrate Council services, resources and expertise to ensure that the council is 'fit for purpose' to lead Belfast Community Safety Partnership, and to deliver the Council's key responsibilities under the 2009-2011 Safer Belfast plan. Proposed structures to drive the process forward within the Council are being developed including mechanisms to involve elected members.

The Community Safety Partnership gains its political legitimacy through all party representation from the Council, with six Members sitting on the Strategic Tier. It also has been accountable through the Health and Environmental Services Committee. However given the cross-cutting nature of the draft Safer Belfast Plan, it is important that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is able to comment on the general direction of the plan and agrees those elements of the plan which relate to the role of Belfast City Council.

The Ministerial review of the future for CSP's and DPPs is likely to have an impact during the review of public administration. However in recognition of the need for closer working between both partnerships there has been significant representation from the various structures within the Belfast DPP throughout the Safer Belfast process.

### Key Issues

#### Key features

This Safer Belfast Plan encompasses much more than Belfast CSP has taken into consideration before. In addition to the delivery of partnership funded projects it includes the core work of partner organisations which relates to community safety.

The sustainability and adaptability of the new CSP approach is considerably strengthened by our investment in a Safer Belfast Analyst to provide relevant and up to date information about community safety issues, and the development of mature performance management systems to measure and deliver continuous improvement.

Performance against the projects and targets will not only be based on trend statistical data by the thematic groups but will also take account of independent monitoring and evaluation, professional judgement and self assessment from community safety projects.

The plan is also drawn up with a degree of flexibility built in to balance strategic programmes with an ability to respond to emerging problems. A process and structure have been put in place to identify emerging themes based on operational information and quality data so that if necessary resources could be re-directed (see appendix iii of the attached report for the Safer Belfast structures).

Communities are at the heart of the Safer Belfast Plan and the Belfast CSP has adopted a range of community engagement principles and processes. However it is recognised that there is a need to continue to develop our approaches to engagement. The real engagement of communities, reflecting their lived experiences within their local areas is a key concern to the CSP and further consideration of how this could be made more meaningful is being considered.

Communication, marketing and awareness raising of the plan is paramount, and it is important that there are clear and consistent messages which are sensitive to community issues and the perceptions of crime and antisocial behaviour.

Responsible reporting and use of the information we have through the Safer Belfast analyst gives us a responsibility to use that information wisely and deliver it to the media in a positive and responsible way.

### Action Plan

The Draft plan lays out the action plan for the delivery of the four thematic areas with detailed projects or initiatives listed in tables. The plan is currently at a high level and there is still much work to be done to finalise the projects, organisation contributions and delivery mechanisms.

There is also some work still to be done in securing funding for some of the project areas or to agree final budget provision from participating organisations. Between now and the next meeting of the CSP on 17th December, members of the community safety team will be holding meetings with member organisations to agree funding and firm up contributions to the plan. Behind each project plan there will be a more detailed action plan for delivery which will focus on the key tasks, objectives, and targets. These will be ready for the roll out of the plan by the end of March 2009.

This plan has to be finally agreed through the Belfast CSP strategic tier by the end of December and will be submitted to the Northern Ireland office on 19th December in order to secure the indicative allocation of approximately £380K per year.

*The antisocial behaviour action plan* builds on the antisocial behaviour forums and is designed around a more localised community led approach. We have attempted to identify the risks to the delivery of the plan. In many cases they relate to the level of youth services and community expectations. Additional work around this theme is being considered on a separate but related agenda within and outside the Council.

The plan will place us in a much better position to tackle environmental antisocial behaviour when the clean neighbourhoods legislation is brought back onto the legislative timetable as it has the potential to assist the process of alleygating as well as providing additional enforcement powers for dealing with such issues as fly positing and graffiti etc. The biggest projects in this section in terms of resources are wardens and alleygates. Other significant projects include the programme for tackling antisocial behaviour on council sites and venues, youth outreach and community safety small grants.

Reducing Alcohol fuelled violent crime work focuses on the supply of alcohol (this relates to antisocial behaviour as well) and compliance with proper standards. Much of the work will be delivered through the Get Home Safe Partnership (a sub partnership of the CSP) and the Council's new antisocial behaviour officers and structures. The projects primarily aim to embed and widen out key aspects of the 'Get Home Safe' work which has been hugely successful. Margaret Ritchie's assembly statement around liquor licensing policy and legislative proposals will also have a bearing on how this work goes forward.

The dealing with hate crime work covers sectarianism, racism, religious hatred, disability and sexual orientation. We will work closely with our Good Relations structures and staff and peace III to deliver actions. The tension monitoring aspect of the work is really important because it will provide a mechanism and process by which we can intervene in areas before the tensions become actual problems.

Helping Belfast feel safer underpins, and is underpinned by, the other three aspects of the plan. The various information projects across the plan will be coordinated through the CSP's information and communication officer. CCTV should perhaps be included here but to do so it needs some strategic leadership and direction because it is such an expensive and significant piece of work.

### Resource Implications

#### Financial

Indicative funding for the overall costs of each project is highlighted within the draft plan. Negotiations to agree these resources are underway. The NIO Community safety Unit will provide in the region of £380 K through grant funding for projects with an additional £123 K for staff posts.

The Council's contributions have been included in the revenue estimates for 2009/2010

### Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Indicate its support for the main elements of the Safer Belfast plan 2009-11;
2. Agree to support the Council's input and role as leading the Safer Belfast Plan 2009-2011.

- 3. Note that there is also a complementary plan being developed to ensure that the Council can internally deliver on the Safer Belfast plan through better cross-departmental working arrangements.**

**Key to Abbreviations**

**CSP - Community Safety Partnership  
DPP - District Policing Partnership”**

The Committee expressed its support for the imbedding of the theme of Community Safety across several Council Departments and urged that every opportunity be taken to enhance co-ordination of the Council's efforts in this regard.

The Chief Executive agreed with the views expressed. He indicated that it was likely that the Northern Ireland Office would issue in the new year a consultation document seeking views on the potential for merging the work of the Community Safety and District Policing Partnerships. He explained further that, as part of the ongoing review of the centre of the organisation, it was his intention to bring to the Committee at an early date a report outlining a process for the greater co-ordination of the Safer City and Safer Belfast themes, including the potential for bringing under a single accountability framework the staff who served the Community Safety and District Policing Partnerships.

The Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the report and noted that the Chief Executive would be submitting a further report on the matter in due course.

Chairman