

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 19th June, 2009

Meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Members present: Councillor Hartley (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Lavery); and
Councillors Adamson, Attwood, D. Browne, M. Browne,
W. Browne, Convery, Crozier, D. Dodds, Hendron,
Kirkpatrick, N. Kelly, A. Maskey, P. Maskey, McCann,
Rodgers, Rodway and Stoker.

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

Apology

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 8th and 22nd May 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 June, subject to:

- (i) the omission of that portion of the minute of 8th May under the heading "Review of Public Administration – Transition Committee in Statute" in so far as it related to Question 8 of the Council's response to the consultation document which, at the request of Councillor Mullaghan, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration; and
- (ii) the omission of the minute of 22nd May under the heading "Consultation on Severance Arrangements for Councillors" which, at the request of Councillor Humphrey, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Recent Racist Attacks

The Chief Executive referred to the racist attacks which had occurred recently in the City. He outlined the actions which were being undertaken by the Council and other statutory agencies to assist those Romanian families which had been affected.

Noted.

Illegal Encampment at Front of City Hall

The Chief Executive referred also to the illegal encampment by a Traveller family at the front of the City Hall. He advised that the Director of Legal Services was working with other relevant statutory agencies, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to have the family moved on to a safe location.

The Committee recognised that the parking of caravans immediately in front of the City Hall gates was wholly inappropriate and authorised the Chief Executive and the Director of Legal Services to take all necessary steps to ensure the removal of the encampment.

Transition Committee in Statute

The Committee considered further that portion of the minute of the meeting of 8th May in relation to Question 8 of the Council's response to the consultation document in respect of the establishment of the Transition Committee in Statute. An extract in that regard is set out hereunder:

“Q8 Do you agree that ‘call-in’ and Qualified Majority Voting (QVM) procedures should be available for the operation of Transition Committees?”

Belfast City Council would be opposed to the proposition that a ‘call-in’ or ‘Qualified Majority Voting’ mechanism would be put in place to challenge the decisions taken by the Transition Committees. This has the potential to significantly delay the decision-making process and indeed could adversely impact upon the entire RPA timetable.”

The Principal Committee Administrator advised the Committee that he had spoken with Councillor Mullaghan, at whose request the minute had been taken back, and had advised him that the closing date for the receipt of responses to the consultation document had passed and the Department of the Environment had indicated that it would be unable to take into consideration any comments made by the Council in relation to Question 8. However, he had advised Councillor Mullaghan also that the Council would have a further opportunity to comment in relation to “call-in” and “weighted majority voting” at a later date when further consultation was being undertaken in connection with the Local Government Reorganisation Bill.

The Committee noted the comments of the Principal Committee Administrator.

Consultation on Severance Arrangements for Councillors

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 22nd May under the heading "Consultation on Severance Arrangements for Councillors". A copy of the minute in that regard is set out hereunder:

"The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Department of the Environment's consultation paper on severance arrangements for Councillors:

'Purpose of Report

To submit for the consideration of the Committee a report regarding the consultation document which has been issued by the Department of the Environment entitled 'Severance Arrangements for Councillors'.

Summary of the Consultation Document

Under the Review of Public Administration, the Executive has proposed severance arrangements as a way of recognising the contribution which long serving Councillors who choose to stand down have made to their local area and to Northern Ireland as a whole. It is also one of the preliminary steps for the reorganisation of Local Government in 2011.

The consultation document puts forward a number of options for possible severance arrangements, including the calculation of the amount of money which could be paid to an individual Councillor, the timing of any scheme and how the associated costs should be met.

Calculation of Award

The Department has set out two options for how severance might be calculated. These are:

- *a set amount for each year of service as a Councillor*

severance could be calculated at a set amount per year, with a possible maximum period of qualifying service. The examples given are £1,000 per year up to a maximum qualifying period of either 36 years (setting a cap of £36,000) or up to a maximum period of 25 years (£25,000) or a maximum period of 20 years (£20,000).

- *level of award grouped by a number of bands according to length of service the level of the award could be determined under a banding system. The example given is Councillors who have served between eight and 10 years would receive £10,000, Councillors who have served more than 10 years but under 15 years would be awarded £15,000 and Councillors who have spent more than 15 years in Local Government would receive £20,000.*

Meeting the Costs of the Awards

Again two options are suggested by the Department for meeting the costs involved. The first option is that, given that the reorganisation of Local Government is a Central Government initiative, the cost should be met by Central Government. The second option is that Local Government should meet the costs as severance payments are essentially recognition of long service by locally-elected representatives.

Timing of the Scheme

The Department has identified three possible options for the introduction of the scheme. These are:

- *in January 2010*
- *in January 2011 prior to the Local Government Elections*
- *at the end of the current Local Government term in 2011.*

Eligibility

The consultation document proposes that MLAs, MPs, MEPs and Members of the House of Lords be not eligible for severance. This has been the approach adopted by the Welsh and Scottish devolved administrations.

The consultation document also asks whether:

- *next of kin should receive severance if a Councillor who has applied for payment under the scheme dies before the award is paid; and*
- *Councillors who receive severance but return to Local Government at a future date should be required to repay in full the amount paid.*

Previous Response

As Members are aware, the issue of severance arrangements for Councillors has been highlighted on numerous occasions by the Council, most recently in September 2006 following the publication of a report compiled by the Councillors' Remuneration Working Group. That Group had been tasked with making recommendations to the then Minister with responsibility for the Department of the Environment regarding the future remuneration of Councillors in Northern Ireland.

In relation to severance payments specifically the report suggested that:

- only Councillors who have served more than one term should be eligible for severance;*
- should a Councillor apply for severance and subsequently put his/her name forward as a candidate for the following Local Government elections the application for severance would be invalidated;*
- if an individual received a severance payment and was subsequently elected as a Councillor, he/she should be required to repay the full sum before taking up office;*
- there should be a provision to allow the severance to be paid to the Councillors' next of kin in the event that he/she died between applying for the scheme and payment being made; and*
- Councillors who are also members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the UK Parliament or the European Parliament would not be eligible for severance.*

The Council welcomed the recommendations made by the Group with regard to severance payments. However, during evidence sessions arranged by the Working Group the Council had in its representation argued that any severance scheme should be on-going rather than a one-off as had been the case in other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Key Issues

Calculation of Award

It is accepted that a severance scheme which provides for a set amount per year of service is primarily to recognise the contribution to public life which Councillors have made through the dedication and commitment they have shown to their constituents and Local Government. That being the case it is appropriate that the maximum qualifying period of service should be set at 38 years,

this being the maximum entitlement a Councillor could attain if the period of service is calculated from the 1973 Local Government Elections. Capping the severance at a lower number of years would in fact mean that those Councillors with the longest service would receive a lower payment per year than other Members, in essence disadvantaging financially those very Members which the scheme sets out to recognise. The overall cost of applying a maximum qualifying period of 38 years, given the relatively few Members who will have this length of service, is negligible. However, for a Member who has completed nine Council terms, it would mean the difference between receiving £1,000 per year of service as opposed to the significantly lower amount of £526 per year if the maximum qualifying period were restricted to 20 years. This would clearly be inequitable and would work against the principle of the Scheme.

A severance scheme based on a set amount for each year of service as an Elected Representative is transparent, easily understood and therefore is likely to be perceived by the general public as a fair means of recognising long service.

Eligibility

It would be more appropriate for the minimum term to be served by a Member before he/she would become eligible for severance to be at least two Council terms, since this would be more acceptable to the general public in terms of the definition of long service.

Exclusion of MLAs, MPs, MEPs and Members of The House of Lords

Members of the House of Lords, at the end of their service in Parliament, receive no resettlement grant nor do they have any pension entitlement. It would therefore be inequitable to exclude them from a severance scheme purely on the basis that they currently serve in another tier of Government. The House of Lords is not an elected Body and it would be unfair to exclude persons appointed to it since they are still representing their constituents yet do not receive any recompense other than a daily allowance for attending the Lords.

Furthermore, given that the underlying principle of a severance scheme is to recognise the long and valuable service given by Members to Local Government, it would be unfair not to include those MLAs, MPs, and MEPs who have contributed to public service and simply penalise them for moving on to a higher elected Body. However, the basis of their entitlement to an award should be calculated only on those years of Local Government service which they have acquired prior to their election to another tier of Government.

Meeting the costs of the Scheme

The cost should be met by Central Government. In both Scotland and Wales the costs of the schemes were borne by the devolved administrations. Given that the review of Public Administration and the reorganisation of Local Government is an initiative which is being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly, it would seem reasonable that the costs associated with the introduction of a severance scheme as part of the overall reorganisation should be met by Central Government.

Timing of the Scheme

It is considered that the scheme should be implemented from January 2010, but with appropriate legislation being enacted to prevent by-elections having to be held to fill vacancies which may arise as a result of Members opting to take severance. Implementing the scheme from January 2010 would also help ensure that new Councillors would gain valuable experience of Local Government in preparation for Councils' assuming additional powers in 2011. In addition, this lead-in time would allow capacity-building issues for new Members to be addressed in a structured and comprehensive manner, thereby helping to ensure a smooth and efficient transition to the new Local Government structures. A phased approach will help reduce the impact of losing experienced Councillors and an introduction of the Scheme to apply during the period from January 2010 until the date of the Local Government elections in May 2011 would be essential.

The second option, to introduce the scheme in January 2011, could potentially result in some Councils trying to conduct their business with a significantly reduced number of Members during the last months of the Council term. This scenario could also be potentially very disruptive to the efficient running of Councils as well as being highly disruptive in Belfast to the operation of proportionality arrangements.

The third option, of implementing the scheme at the end of the Local Government term in 2011, is the least favourable in that in the crucial period leading up to the full implementation of the Review of Public Administration it may result in Councils being faced with working through a complex transition process with retiring Members who may have a peripheral interest only in the restructuring of Local Government and the additional powers which Councils will assume.

**Consultation with The National Association
Of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region)**

The Council has in the past liaised closely with the National Association of Councillors in all matters relating to Councillors' interests and particularly remuneration and severance. I have spoken to the Secretary of the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region), Councillor Ronnie Ferguson, regarding the consultation document and specifically the proposals being suggested which it is felt would enhance the scheme and ensure that it is equitable and does not disadvantage any long serving Member of Local Government. Councillor Ferguson has indicated that the National Association of Councillors response to the consultation document will mirror the response being made by Belfast City Council.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to:

- 1. A set amount of £1,000 per year being payable up to a maximum of 38 years;*
- 2. eligibility for severance being restricted to Members who have served a minimum of two Council terms;*
- 3. the inclusion of Members of the House of Lords in the severance scheme and also the inclusion of MLAs, MPs, and MEPs but on the basis that their entitlement to an award would be calculated only on those years of Local Government service which they have acquired prior to their election to another tier of Government;*
- 4. the next of kin of a Member being entitled to severance in the event that a Councillor dies after applying for severance but before the payment has been made;*
- 5. a recipient of severance having to repay it in full in the event that they return subsequently to serve in Local Government before a period of two Council terms has elapsed;*
- 6. Central Government being responsible for meeting the costs associated with the introduction of a severance scheme;*

7. *introducing the scheme to apply during the period from January, 2010 until the date of the Local Government elections in May, 2011, providing that the necessary legislation on co-option is implemented; and*
8. *the attached response to the consultation document (Appendix 1) being approved and submitted to the Department of the Environment.*

Decision Tracking

Following approval at Council in June the Head of Committee and Members' Services will submit the Council's response to the Department of the Environment.

Belfast City Council's Draft Response to the Department of the Environment Consultation Document on Severance Arrangements for Councillors

Question 1: Do you have any comments about the proposal to introduce a severance scheme for Councillors?

Belfast City Council, having long lobbied for a severance scheme for Councillors, welcomes the proposal to award Members' severance payments in recognition of their long and valued service to Local Government.

Question 2: Do you agree that MLAs, MPs, Members of the House of Lords and MEPs should not be eligible for a severance award?

The Council believes that it would be inequitable to exclude Members of the House of Lords from the severance scheme given that at the end of their service in Parliament they receive no resettlement grant nor do they have any pension entitlement. Furthermore, given that the underlying principle of the severance scheme is to recognise the long and valuable service given by Members to Local Government, it would be unfair not to include those MLAs, MPs, and MEPs who have contributed to public service before being elected to a higher tier of Government. However, the basis of their entitlement to an award should be calculated only on those years of Local Government service which they have acquired prior to their election to another tier of Government.

Question 3: Should the eligibility criteria include a minimum period of service? If yes, what should that period be?

The Council is of the opinion that the eligibility criteria should include a minimum period of service. It is felt that it is appropriate for the minimum term to be served by a Member before they become eligible for severance to be at least two Council terms. A minimum of two terms is more likely to be acceptable to the general public in terms of the definition of long service and the actual costs of any scheme.

The Council is also in favour of cumulative service being applied to determine the level of award.

Question 4: *Do you agree that a provision allowing a Councillor's next of kin to receive the award should be included in the severance scheme?*

It is recognised that serving as an Elected Representative involves a significant amount of time being spent both on Council and constituency business. This commitment undoubtedly impacts on family life and therefore the Council feels that it is wholly appropriate that in the event of a Councillor dying after applying for severance but before the payment has been made the next of kin should be entitled to receive the full amount.

Question 5: *With regard to the timing of the scheme which of the three options listed below do you consider most suitable?*

Option 1 - Introduce the scheme in January 2010

Option 2 - Introduce the scheme from January 2011

Option 3 - Introduce the scheme at the end of the Local Government term in 2011

The Council is in favour of option one, implementing the scheme from January 2010, providing that appropriate legislation is enacted to prevent by-elections being held to fill vacancies which have arisen as the result of Members opting to take severance. Implementing the scheme from January 2010 would also help ensure that new Councillors would gain valuable experience of Local Government in preparation for Councils' assuming additional powers in 2011. In addition, this lead-in time would allow capacity-building issues for new Members to be addressed in a structured and comprehensive manner, thereby helping to ensure a smooth and efficient transition to the new Local Government structures. A phased approach will help reduce the impact of losing experienced Councillors.

The second option would potentially result in some Councils trying to conduct their business with a significantly reduced number of Members in the last months of the Council term. This scenario could also be potentially very disruptive to the efficient running of the Council as well as forcing Councils to revisit their proportionality arrangements.

The third option is the least favourable in that in the crucial period leading up to the full implementation of the Review of Public Administration it may result in Councils being faced with working through a complex transition process with retiring Members who may have a peripheral interest only in the restructuring of Local Government and the additional powers which Councils will assume.

Question 6: Is there another more suitable time to make the scheme available?

No.

Question 7: Which of the two methods set out below for calculating the award do you consider most suitable?

Option 1 – A set amount for each year of Service as a Councillor

Option 2 – Level of award grouped by a number of bands according to length of service

The Council is in favour of Option 1, with a set amount of £1,000 per year of service being awarded up to a maximum of £38,000.

Question 8: Should there be a maximum amount for an individual award? If yes, what sum should that be?

The Council is of the view that it is reasonable to set a maximum amount of £38,000 for an individual award. This sum, for which a relatively low number of Members will be eligible, ensures that those with the longest service are not in fact disadvantaged financially in terms of the amount which they would be entitled to for each year of service given.

Question 9: Who do you think should meet the cost of a severance scheme?

Of the two options for meeting the costs of the scheme, that is, the costs should be met by Councils or by Central Government, the Council is of the opinion that the cost should be met by Central Government. In both Scotland and Wales the costs of the schemes were borne by the devolved administrations. Given that the Review of Public Administration and the reorganisation of Local Government is an initiative which is being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly it would seem reasonable that the costs associated with the introduction of a severance scheme as part of the overall reorganisation should be met by Central Government.

Question 10: Should a recipient of an award be required to repay it in full in the event that he/she is elected or co-opted to a Council at a future date?

The Council is of the opinion that a recipient of an award who subsequently returns to serve in Local Government should be expected to repay the award in full unless a period of two Council terms has elapsed.'

The Committee approved the foregoing comments as the Council's response to the consultation document."

The Principal Committee Administrator reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 24th April, it had agreed to defer consideration of a report in relation to the Council's response to the consultation paper to enable the Party Groupings on the Council to consider the matter. Following further consultation with Members, a revised report and response to the consultation document had been submitted to the meeting of the Committee on 26th May, when the response had been approved. Subsequently, at its meeting on 1st June, at the request of Councillor Humphrey, the Council had agreed that the matter be taken back to the Committee to allow the Political Party Groupings to give further consideration to the proposals.

The Principal Committee Administrator explained that, as the closing date for responses to the consultation had been 31st May, a copy of the Council's comments had been forwarded to the Department of the Environment on 27th May, with the proviso that the decision would be subject to ratification by the Council on 1st June. Following the Council's decision, the Department of the Environment had been contacted and advised that the Council's response had not yet been ratified. The Department had been advised also that the Council would not be in a position to resubmit a response until after the Council meeting on 1st July at the earliest and had been asked whether the Council's response would still be taken into consideration if it had not been approved until that time.

A reply had been received from the Department's Policy Division acknowledging the non-ratification of the Council's comments and stating that it would not be able to take the views of the Council into account, since the Assembly's Environment Committee had requested a synopsis of responses to the consultation by 19th June in order to permit the Minister to introduce to the Assembly in late June the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which would contain the enabling power for the Department to introduce a Severance Scheme. However, the Department had indicated that the views of the Council might be able to be taken into account when the subordinate legislation was being framed.

The Committee affirmed its decision of 26th May to approve the response and agreed that it be submitted to the Department in order that the Council's views might be taken into account during the framing of the subordinate legislation.

Transition Committee Business

Review of Public Administration Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"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 together with ongoing transfer of functions issues.**

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Timetable

2.1.1 The key driver over the next number of months will be the legislative timetable and the need to ensure that the Council is geared up and prepared to engage within this process (e.g. agreed corporate positions on those key policy proposals emerging from the Policy Development Panels which will shape the legislation; develop an understanding of the consequences for the Council; build political awareness and a constituency around the key areas of concern etc). In terms of key milestones in the process:

- **June – September 2009** - within the next number of weeks the DoE are scheduled to release two major consultation exercises on the Local Government (Finance) Bill and the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which will significantly dictate the future shape and operation of councils post RPA.
- **30th June** - Boundary Commissioner to release final recommendations on new Local Government Boundaries
- **May 2011** - Elections to new Councils

2.2 Transition Committee/Transition Management Teams – Key Tasks and Milestones

2.2.1 The DoE has recently issued an Advisory Note which sets out the proposed key tasks and milestones for Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams. Whilst Belfast City Council stands in somewhat of a different position to its local government counterparts, it will still need to be cognisant of the proposed programme of work and key milestones to be put in place around the RPA. Accordingly, relevant strands of work have been incorporated within the Council's own implementation plan.

2.2.2 Work is currently underway to translate this Advisory Note into a detailed high-level RPA Implementation (transition) Plan for Belfast City Council. It would be intended that this initial plan would form the basis of a Forward Work Plan for the committee in regards to those important RPA related issues which need to be taken forward and aligned to the overall RPA implementation programme.

2.2.3 Subsequently, it is proposed that a familiarisation workshop be scheduled, for August 2009, with the newly appointed Members of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to examine the respective roles and responsibilities of the Committee within its capacity as the Council's RPA Transition Committee and to seek early political direction and buy-in to an RPA 'Forward Work Plan' for the Committee which is aligned to the overall RPA implementation programme.

2.2.4 Inevitably, the level of RPA related activity will grow in intensity and scope throughout the transition period and its management and delivery must be adequately resourced and co-ordinated. It is important to recognise that planning is a process of constant review, re-prioritisation, refinement and refocusing of effort and resource in line with shifting demands and needs. Therefore, this timetable and work plan should be viewed as live documents which will be further amended to reflect potential changes to the external programme of work or to take account of important issues as they may arise of ad-hoc issues as they arise.

2.3 Engagement with Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee

2.3.1 Members will recall that correspondence had been received from the Transition Committee for Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough requesting that the Belfast Transition Committee consider their representation on its Committee. This request had been considered by the Committee, at its meeting on the 8th May 2009, and it was agreed...

'that both Lisburn City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council be advised that Belfast's Transition Committee had already been established and the membership agreed by the Environment Minister but that the Committee would be willing to meet with other Transition Committees to discuss areas of mutual concern in relation to the transfer of assets and functions'.

2.3.2 Subsequently, the Chief Executive has recently received the following two pieces of correspondence from Castlereagh Borough Council (on behalf of the Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee):

1. *Greater Belfast Area discussions*, dated 28th May – sought the Council's involvement in a meeting between the Councils within the Greater Belfast area to discuss wider infrastructure and marketing issues on a sub-regional basis.

2. *Representation on Belfast's Transition Committee*, dated 3rd June a meeting has been sought between the Chief Executive of Lisburn City Council, Acting Chief Executive of Castlereagh Borough Council, together with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Castlereagh/ Lisburn Transition Committee and representatives from Belfast City Council to discuss its concerns in regard to representation.

2.3.3 If it is agreed that this meeting proceeds, it is recommended that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) and the party group Leaders on the Committee (or their nominees) attend the meeting alongside the Chief Executive.

2.4 Review of RPA Delivery Infrastructure

2.4.1 The RPA Strategic Leadership Board had agreed, at its meeting on 22nd May 2009, that a review would be undertaken of the established local government reform programme organisational structures i.e. SLB, PDPs and RTCG. The review will, inter alia, make recommendations on appropriate structures and governance arrangements for managing and integrating the continued work necessary for transition to May 2011.

2.4.2 The Joint DoE/NILGA Secretariat has arranged a focus group session for Thursday 22nd June 2009 at 1.30pm in NILGA Offices and has invited all Chairs (or that of a nominee) of Transition Committees to participate in this event. The purpose of the event is to provide attendees with an opportunity to submit the views of the respective Transition Committees on the reform programme to date and put forward any suggestions on improvements to the structures and processes for the next stage of the reform process.

2.5 Moving to implementation

2.5.1 Notwithstanding this review the focus of the RPA process is rapidly moving towards the implementation phase with support structures being put in place with the Environment Minister recently agreeing to the establishment of a Local Government Joint Forum to take forward negotiation and consultation on all HR related issues; and a Finance and Estates Sub-Group of the Regional Transition Coordination Group to take forward consideration of Finance and Estates implementation issues. All efforts will be taken to ensure that Belfast City Council is represented on these established structures.

2.6 RPA Seminars for Transition Committees & Transition Management Teams

2.6.1 To support information dissemination and sharing of best practice it was agreed that a series of seminars would be hosted by the SLB Joint Secretariat with the support of SOLACE to provide guidance and support during the transition process. There is no fee for attendance at these events.

2.6.2 The first seminar in the series will take place on Monday 6 July 2009, 9.45am-3pm in the Craigavon Civic Centre and is entitled 'Making Transition Work: The Role of Elected Members and Officers. Copies of this have already been circulated to all members.

2.6.3 Approval is therefore sought for the attendance of members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at the relevant RPA seminars.

3.0 Resource Implications

Whilst there are clearly Human Resource and financial implications attached the Council's ongoing involvement and management of the RPA change process, there are no direct implications contained within this report. It is the intention to map out resource requirements at our COMT workshop in June.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (a)** agree that an RPA workshop/familiarisation session will those Members of Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) in August 2009;
- (b)** consider the request from the Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee in regard to Belfast's engagement with neighbouring councils to discuss issues of mutual concern;
- (c)** consider the request from Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee to meet with the Council to discuss their concerns in regard to representation on the Belfast Transition Committee and agree that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, the Party Group Leaders on the Committee (or their nominees) and the Chief Executive would meet them if it is agreed to proceed;

- (d) approve the attendance of the Chair (or that of a nominee) to the scheduled Focus Group sessions on the review of the RPA Reform Structures; and
- (e) approve the attendance of Members of the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) to the RPA information seminars to be hosted by the SLB Joint Secretariat.

5.0 Decision Tracking

1. RPA familiarisation session for those Members of the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) - Director of Improvement by August 2009;
2. Convene meeting between representations of the Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee and the Belfast City Council Transition Committee, Chief Executive, by September 2009."

During discussion in the matter, the Chief Executive advised the Members that Council officers had been undertaking work in order to identify the revenue costs to the Council which would arise through the transfer of functions. However, this work was being progressed by reference to existing budgets and obviously these would be subject to amendment in the comprehensive saving review being developed for 2011 onwards. A progress report on the work would be brought to the Committee in September together with an update on the discussion regarding finance taking place at the Strategic Leadership Board

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed to the meeting with the Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee as outlined.

Modernisation and Improvement

Review of the Centre

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Review of the Centre of the Organisation:

"Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to present to Members the findings of the Review of the Centre and to discuss a way forward in terms of both agreeing the recommendations and implementing them.

The Review of the Centre covers the Chief Executive's Department, Legal Services, Corporate Services and Core Improvement. It was initiated in agreement with Members in recognition that a number of issues facing the council require addressing. These issues include:

- the negative impact of the economic recession on council income in terms of fees and charges and the district rate;
- the potential for reduced levels of public money available for investment in Belfast;
- the Review of Public Administration will increase the range of services provided and the size of the population to be served;
- the council has already made nearly £7.0m in cash savings over the past four years and needs to find more transformational ways of delivering further savings;
- how best the centre of the organisation can best support Members to meet the key strategic challenge of:
 - integrating functional service delivery with thematic priorities;
 - meeting need at a local level;
 - developing the council's place-shaping role in the city; and
 - keeping rates increases to a minimum;
- the need to better manage the risk of major projects as highlighted by the Local Government Auditor; and
- the replacement of the Director of Corporate Services and the interim position of the Director of Improvement.

In summary, the aim of the review which is set at a high level is to support the development of an effective corporate centre that fully supports the organisation's requirements whilst, at the same providing value for money to the ratepayer.

The review was carried out by Sector Projects and the Executive Summary of their report is attached. Sector talked to Members, 50 senior officers, and staff representatives as part of the review.

Key Issues

The following is a summary of the key Sector's key findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The findings of the review support the steps already taken by Members to create a fit for purpose organisation.
- The corporate centre employs just over 28% of council staff and accounts for 30% of council expenditure. This is large compared to local authorities in the United Kingdom.

- Sector estimate that at least £1m cash savings can be achieved over the next three years if the recommendations contained in the report are implemented.
- There is an opportunity to reduce overlap and duplication both at the centre and between the centre and the support functions within departments.
- There is a need for central services to find better ways to demonstrate value for money provided.
- There is an urgent need to improve governance and control of both finance and HR functions.
- Sector supports the moves by Members to improve performance management across the organisation.
- Sector recognises the need to properly resource customer focus work and the transformation and efficiency agenda.
- There is a need to better support the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to co-ordinate the development and monitoring of policies and initiatives.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of high level structural recommendations which if implemented would result in the following:

- The Director of Legal Services taking on additional responsibilities for Member Services, Registrars and Records Management.
- The CIT Unit to renamed the Performance and Planning Team, reporting to the Chief Executive with responsibility for policy, planning, performance and the transformation agenda.
- The creation of a Property and Projects Directorate with responsibility for all property related functions.
- The Director of Corporate Services post to be renamed the Director of Finance and Resources with responsibility for Finance, HR, ISB and Audit, Risk and Governance.
- The creation of one Business Support Unit for each central department.
- The creation of a small customer focus team based in ISB.
- The transfer of the District Policing Partnership Team to the Health and Environment Department and the Good Relations Unit to the Development Department.

- The report also recommends that given the budgetary pressure the council is under, political direction should be sought on whether there is any will to retain staff on a supernumerary basis for any prolonged length of time after September 2009.
- It is also recommended that detailed reviews should be carried out in relation to:
 - Finance
 - Projects and Corporate Systems
 - Member Services
 - Business Support
 - Human Resources
 - Admin of Buildings
 - Building Maintenance
 - Vehicle Maintenance

Way Forward

It is recognised that the recommendations contained in the report will mean significant change for the council and will be difficult to implement. Members will require detailed briefings and sufficient time to consider the Sector report in detail. For these reasons, it is recommended that detailed briefings are provided to Members over the summer period and the full report to be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September for agreement.

Whatever recommendations are decided on by Members, it is important that the council is in a position to implement them quickly so that the initial savings can be captured in time for the 2010/11 budget round. The Sector report recommends a structure that should be put in place to support the implementation of the agreed recommendations. It would consist of the following:

Budget and Transformation Panel – would oversee the implementation of the programme on behalf of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. This Panel is already up and running.

Director of Finance and Resources – to be accountable for the delivery of the programme.

Transformation Team – to implement the recommendations. Resources would be obtained from a realignment of existing staff and would not present an additional burden to the ratepayer.

External Change Manager – who would lead the Transformation Team and provide an independent support to the Budget and Transformation Panel. Given the nature of the review it is important that the work is led by someone external to the council and who has no personal interest in the outcome of the review. It is likely that the External Change Manager would be required for an initial six months with the position being reviewed at this point. The position would be financed from existing resources and from in-year budgetary savings emanating from the review.

Given the lead time required to put this support structure in place and the need to ensure that the organisation is ready to implement the recommendations once they are agreed so that the savings can be captured, permission is sought from Members to start putting together the Transformation Team and recruit the External Change Manager.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree to the following:

1. To attend detailed briefings on the review over the summer period.
2. To consider the report in detail at the September meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
3. To agree to the support structure as outlined above which will be required to implement the recommendations of review
4. To agree to start the process of putting the support structure in place so that it is operational in time for implementing the recommendations emanating from the review as soon as they are agreed by Members. This will include the recruitment of an External Change Manager for an initial period of six months.”

In response to a number of questions, the Chief Executive confirmed that the cost of the employment of an External Change Manager would be met from existing budgets and that it was vital that work commenced on the project as quickly as possible to ensure that efficiency measures could be considered as part of the 09/10 rate setting process. He stated that the process would be driven by himself and the Director of Corporate Services with the Transformation Team being made up of those officers in

the Core Improvement Team who were already involved in the process. He explained that, in order to ensure that the process did not lose momentum over the summer period, it would be beneficial if authority were to be delegated to the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Budget and Transformation Panel to approve short-term actions.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Budget and Transformation Panel to approve short-term actions over the summer period.

Democratic Services and Governance

Change of Time of Meeting

In accordance with Notice on the Agenda, the Chairman (Councillor Hartley) requested that the Committee give consideration to changing the time of the meeting on 7th August from 12.30 p.m. to 10.00 a.m.

The Committee agreed to the change of time.

Lord Mayor's Personal Allowance

The Committee deferred consideration of a report in relation to the Lord Mayor's Personal Allowance to enable further information to be obtained.

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

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

<u>Organisation / Body</u>	<u>Event / Date – Number of Delegates / Guests</u>	<u>Request</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
Northern Ireland Hospice	International Conference on Pushing Boundaries in Palliative and End of Life Care 5 th October, 2009 Approximately 80 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	It is estimated that 150 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	The provision of a drinks reception in the form of wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £320

<u>Organisation / Body</u>	<u>Event / Date – Number of Delegates / Guests</u>	<u>Request</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
The Law Society of Northern Ireland	The Law Society of Northern Ireland Council Dinner 23 rd October, 2009 Approximately 300 attending	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 would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together'.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,200
Institute of Directors Northern Ireland Division	The Institute of Directors' North South Dinner 20 th May, 2010 Approximately 150 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	The Institute of Directors is an international organisation which champions the entrepreneur and seeks to provide an environment conducive to business success. The North South Dinner aims to celebrate partnership between business people and to facilitate a valuable networking opportunity. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £600

In response to a Member's question, the Principal Committee Administrator indicated that the recommendations had been based on the criteria which had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 26th September, 2003. The criteria governed the granting of the use of accommodation in the City Hall to those bodies and organisations which were able to demonstrate that their events would contribute to the achievement of one or more of the Council's Strategic Objectives. He pointed out that the Committee, the previous month, had revised its Strategic Objectives and therefore the criteria for the use of accommodation in the City Hall and the provision of Civic Hospitality was being revised currently also and a report thereon would be submitted to the Committee in August. He undertook to append to future reports a copy of the criteria for the use of the City Hall.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and adopted the recommendations.

City Hall Reopening

(Mrs. M. T. McGivern, Director of Development, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Development advised the Members that, following its closure for refurbishment for eighteen months at a cost of £11 million, the reopening of the City Hall would be a key event in the 2009 Celebrations which the Council had been co-ordinating with other stakeholders in the City. The Director of Development explained that she had been tasked to lead a cross-Departmental group to consider and bring forward ideas and plans for the formal and public reopening of the City Hall.

The group had considered its task in the context of the following issues:

- any reopening of the City Hall should aim to maximise the number of individuals and groups visiting the refurbished building and encourage the ongoing 'openness' of the Hall to the citizens of and visitors to the City; and
- the current economic climate meant that the optimisation of any existing and available resources should be utilised rather than seeking to expend additional resources.

As a consequence, it was recommended that the reopening should take place over a number of days rather than as a one-off event, thereby increasing the number of visitors, and should occur at a time when it could be linked to and utilise other events taking place in Belfast. Taking everything into account, the period from 17th till 31st October, 2009 had been deemed to be the most appropriate for the holding of events to mark the reopening.

The draft programme included some new events but also utilised a number of events which had already been planned for that period. The programme also linked the Festival at Queen's, Belfast Fashion Week and the Hallowe'en Festival in order to maximise impact. It would serve also to kick-start a very significant events programme for the City from mid-October right up to Christmas which could tie in with the tourism and retail strategy. The Director stated that the programme, a copy of which had previously been circulated, set out the events and associated costs, indicated the various groups and categories which were targeted and sought to attract as wide a range of people as possible and to utilise existing budgets. In addition, negotiations had been taking place with the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society to produce an architectural history of the City Hall in time for the reopening at an approximate cost of £13,000.

After a lengthy discussion, the Committee:

- (i) approved the reopening programme, subject to the inclusion of an event detailing the Council's contribution to the economic life of the City and those services which it delivered to the public and to the omission of the holding of a civic dinner;
- (ii) agreed that a further report which provided appropriate alternative options for the holding of community-based events instead of the holding of a civic dinner be submitted to its next meeting; and
- (iii) approved also the production of a book on the architectural history of the City Hall at an approximate cost of £13,000.

Finance

Minutes of Meeting of Audit Panel

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel of 15th June.

Annual Accounts 2008/09

The Committee was advised that the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 required the Council to approve by resolution the Statement of Accounts as soon as reasonably practicable and in any event before 30th June immediately following the end of the financial year. The Director of Corporate Services submitted for the Committee's consideration the Council's Statement of Accounts and Financial Report for the year ended 31st March, 2009. The report explained the Council's finances during the previous financial year and its financial position at the end of that year. The Director confirmed that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2009 had been prepared in the form directed by the Department of the Environment and, in his opinion, presented fairly the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

He explained that, during the year, the Council had reported a reduction on the District Fund balance of £3,274,966. This had reduced the credit balance on the District Fund reserves to £3,069,851, which was approximately 1.7% of annual gross expenditure, or 2.1% of net operating expenditure.

The reduction had been made up as follows:

	£
Contribution from Reserves	2,400,000
Transfer to Provisions	306,012
Reduction in Specified Reserves	713,724
Loss of General Grant/Rate Income	66,920
Departmental Surplus	(770,540)
Accrual for Wages Paid 09/10	361,430
Prior Year Adjustment	197,420

The Council aimed currently to maintain the level of District Fund Reserves in the region of 5% of annual gross expenditure. Currently, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy did not define a minimum or maximum level of reserves but rather felt it appropriate for Local Authorities, on the advice of their finance directors, to make their own judgement on such matters taking into account all the relevant local circumstances.

The Director reported that the Council's Reserves were made up currently of the following:

District Fund - £3,069,851

These could be used to supplement income and unexpected expenditure in future years

City Investment Fund - £4,385,110

The City Investment Fund had been created to give a clear demonstration of the Council's wish to contribute to the vibrancy, prosperity, culture and attractiveness of the City. The Committee, at its meeting on 14th December, 2007, had agreed that the cash flow requirements necessary to establish the Fund and had indicated that in the 2008/09 financial year £1 million was to be allocated from reserves and income received from the sale of land to the Department for Regional Development in relation to the M1 upgrade, which amounted to £1,428,885. In addition, £118,775 had been drawn down from the reserve during the year in relation to the Connswater Greenway and Titanic Project.

Capital Receipts Reserve - £860,000

These were capital receipts which had originated primarily from the sale of assets and which had not yet been used to finance capital expenditure.

Repairs and Renewals Fund - £14,617,208

This Fund had been established under Section 56 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and had an approved limit of £22 million which was to fund the closure of the landfill site.

Other Fund Balances and Reserves - £515,778

This related to the Election Reserve which had been set up to smooth the costs of running Council Elections.

Rates Claw-Back Reserve - £(191,279)

This related to the Minister for Finance's decision to allow Local Authorities to defer the impact of the revaluation of Ministry of Defence properties over a four-year period, thereby smoothing the impact on the District Fund Reserves.

After discussion, it was

Resolved – That the Committee approves the Council's Financial Accounts and Report for the year ended 31st March, 2009.

Minutes of Meeting of Budget and Transformation Panel

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel of 5th June.

Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Land and Property Services Agency

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 17th October, it had agreed to establish a Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Land and Property Services Agency for the overall service which was provided by the Agency. Over the previous year the Council had established a good working relationship with Land and Property Services, with the Building Control Service having already established a formal agreement in regard to notifications of new and altered buildings. It had been argued that by entering into a Service Level Agreement with Land and Property Services, the Council would be better placed to work with the Agency to improve its key processes and to ensure that it provided value for money to both the Council and the ratepayers of

Belfast. The Director of Corporate Services explained that the agreement which was being recommended to the Committee was better known as a Memorandum of Understanding rather than a Service Level Agreement since this better reflected not just the current level of service but also the need to improve. The Memorandum had been reviewed independently on behalf of the Council by the Institute of Revenue, Rating and Valuation and its overall aims were as follows:

- to provide a framework for Land and Property Services and the Council to work in a spirit of collaboration, thereby assisting each other in the delivery of their corporate objectives;
- to maximise the proportion of rates collected and to create further equity in the rating system within the Council area through the provision of timely and accurate information; and
- to assist in the economic development of the Council area through the sharing of timely, accurate and current information, including in the areas of robust financial planning and spatial referencing of property through addressing and mapping, as well as the registration of properties throughout the Council area in the Land Register and effective asset management.

The Memorandum covered key areas of concern raised by Members, such as the maintenance of the Valuation List, vacant property control, the provision of Estimated Penny Product information, the cost of collection, irrecoverables, Valuation Tribunal and Lands Tribunal decisions and legislative and policy changes. It highlighted also areas for specific focus in 2009/10 and it recommended that priority be given to the following:

- agreeing performance indicators, informed by benchmarking and consideration of best practice;
- robust management of vacant property listings in conformance with the Land and Property Services Vacancy Strategy; and
- robust management of rating debts so as to maximise recovery and minimise irrecoverables.

Formal reviews of the Memorandum of Understanding would be held biannually, which would involve senior managers from both the Council and the Agency. The outcomes of those reviews would be reported to the Committee in due course.

The Committee agreed to adopt the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Land and Property Services Agency.

Allocation of Thematic Budget 2009/10

The Committee was reminded that, as part of the process for developing the 2008-2011 Corporate Plan, Members had identified a number of cross-cutting priorities, such as creating a safer City and providing better services for younger people and older people, which could not be delivered solely within functional budgets. Accordingly, when agreeing the revenue estimates for the current year, the Committee had agreed that a “thematic budget” of £500,000 should be created to support the implementation of the themes within the Corporate Plan.

The Chief Executive stated that the cross-Departmental nature of the work involved in the thematic areas meant that a number of Departments, Working Groups and Committees were involved in their development and implementation. Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee make a broad budget allocation to each of the themes so that the Working Groups and Committees responsible could implement a number of projects within the set amounts. The proposed allocation, which is set out hereunder, was based upon an initial scoping of possible projects and programmes which had the potential to be delivered during 2009/10:

<u>Objective</u>	<u>£</u>
Older People	87,000
Health and Wellbeing	100,000
Safer City	145,000
Better Care for Belfast’s Environment	57,000
Children and Young People	<u>100,000</u>
Total	<u>489,000</u>

The Chief Executive explained that a specific request had already been received from the Health and Environmental Services Committee for support from the safer City allocation for the City-wide community safety warden scheme. At its meeting on 3rd June, that Committee had agreed that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in respect to the safer city theme. The Committee had agreed to a proposal to the rollout of a City-wide community safety warden scheme from the summer of 2009, subject to funding being secured from the Council and external agencies. The project was dependant upon funds from the Council to lever in partner funds, totalling £491,000, and accordingly the Health and Environmental Services Committee had requested that £100,000 from the Corporate Plan Thematic Budget be allocated for that purpose. The request was being submitted to the Committee at this stage since the current warden posts were due to be terminated at the end of June and a commitment needed to be made in order to ensure that the gap in service delivery was kept to a minimum.

The Committee approved the broad allocation of the thematic budget as set out above and noted that further updates on the expenditure of the budget would be submitted to the Committee. The Committee agreed also that £100,000 of the Safer City budget be allocated to the City-wide warden scheme in order to secure partner funds for the project.

Request for Funding - Ashfield Girls School

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 14th November, it had agreed to provide funding to the Be Your Best Foundation in respect of the Belfast Rock Challenge, a drug and crime prevention event which had been held in the Belfast Waterfront Hall. It was reported that Ashfield Girls School had qualified from the Belfast event and had attended the United Kingdom Northern Region winners final which had been held in Grimsby in May. The school had achieved further success at that event and had now qualified for the United Kingdom national finals, which were due to take place in Sheffield in July.

At Ashfield, participation in Rock Challenge was an extra-curricular activity involving considerable voluntary input from teachers on parent support groups. The School proposed to take the entire cast of approximately 140 pupils, accompanied by 17 volunteer teaching staff, to the event in Sheffield. The cost for the group to attend had been estimated at £20,000, which included the hire of transport for participants and the transfer of props, staging and costumes. No specific funding for attending the event was available from the Department of Education, although a contribution from the school general budget was being considered. Support of £5,000 had, to date, been received from private sector sponsors.

It was recommended that the Committee approve a "one-off" contribution of £2,000 towards the participation of Ashfield Girls School in the first United Kingdom national final of the Rock Challenge award.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and

Resolved – That funding of £2,000 be approved in respect of the aforementioned event 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 benefits so accruing would be commensurate with the payments to be made.

Authority to Seek Tenders

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

- (i) a framework agreement for the supply of workstations and laptops;
- (ii) the supply of employment agency assignments;
- (iii) window cleaning services at an approximate cost of £23,500 per annum. The contract to be awarded for a period of one year, with an option to renew for a further two years;

- (iv) the supply and fitting of hydraulic hoses, the annual cost of which was approximately £10,500, with the contract to be for a one year period, with the option to renew for a further two years; and
- (v) the provision of a vehicle inspection service at an annual cost of £15,000. The contract being for a one year period, with the option to renew for a further two years.

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

Duncrue Industrial Estate
In-Ground Gas Extraction System

The Committee was advised that an in-ground gas extraction system on the Dargan Crescent area of the Duncrue Industrial Estate had been in operation for many years for the protection of buildings from the hazards associated with the potential ingress of landfill gas. The Council was required, in accordance with legislation, to undertake steps to mitigate any risks arising from methane which might emanate from the ground in that area and, since the existing gas extraction system had reached the end of its useful life, it was essential that it was replaced for reasons of health and safety. The Committee had previously approved the acceptance of a tender under the general scheme of delegation for the aforementioned system. However, the tender which had been recommended for acceptance had been significantly in excess of the approved budget and, in accordance with financial regulations, the tender was being presented for the Committee for specific approval.

The Director of Improvement reported that the tenders had initially been invited in December, 2008 from a select list. However, only one contractor had returned a tender, which had been in excess of £900,000. This had been considered to be excessive and tenders had been re-invited using an open tendering process.

He explained that three tenders had subsequently been received and these had been evaluated in line with the Council's procurement procedures. The most advantageous tender, which was also the lowest submitted, was that of Earney Contracts in the sum of £455,990.61 and it was recommended that this be accepted.

The current capital programme included an amount of £320,000 for this proposal which had been based on an initial assessment provided by the Council's Consulting Engineer who had advised in relation to the management of the landfill gas. A subsequent updated estimate of £425,350 had been provided in December, 2008. The updated pre-tender estimate had not included additional items which had been added prior to the tender process to allow for off-site disposal of potentially unsuitable material to landfill at a cost of approximately £30,000. The estimate might also have underestimated the premium attached by tendering firms in respect of the difficulty of working in an operational industrial estate and the uncertainty in the pricing of pipework and fittings which was a significant component of the project and was susceptible to the fluctuating price of petroleum. There appeared also to be a shortage of contracting organisations willing to undertake such a complex and specialist project, thereby resulting in less competition for the contract.

As the project had been tendered twice already, it was unlikely that further re-tendering would result in any appreciable cost reduction.

The financial position of the proposal was as follows:

	£
Recommended tender	455,990.61
Fees, statutory charges, etc.	<u>57,009.39 (rounded)</u>
Total	513,000.00
Capital Programme Allowance	<u>320,000.00</u>
Nett increase in cost	193,000.00

The Committee approved the acceptance of the tender submitted by Earney Contracts in the sum of £455,990.61 and the making of an application to the Department of the Environment for the sanction to the raising of a loan, if required, to pay for the works.

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

Asset Management

Loughside Park

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Parks & Leisure Committee, at their meeting on 11 May 2009, to which Members of the Development Committee were invited, adopted the recommendation to note the current position and agreed:

- 1. that the Council should proceed with the development of facilities comprising one grass pitch, one 3G pitch, changing accommodation with attached community rooms, outdoor play areas at Loughside/Mount Vernon, general open space and associated works; subject to planning permission being approved for the overall joint development proposals and payment of the £14.051m capital receipt by Bayshore Developments Ltd. on completion of the sale; and**

2. to commend the decision of the Committee to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. At their meeting on 22 May 2009, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee agreed to defer for one month consideration of a report in relation to the development of the Loughside Park to enable further information to be provided.

Key Issues

The overriding issue to ensure that monies are released and that this scheme goes forward is to obtain planning permission, which, in turn, is dependent on putting back adequate facilities.

The decision of the Community & Recreation Committee in January 2007 (to provide a replacement pitch, play area and a community focussed facility at Loughside and a kickabout/activity area at Mount Vernon) was unlikely to obtain planning permission as the Planning Service had difficulties, both with loss of open space and with additional retail provision arising from the developer's proposals.

The latter point has been improved through the change in the deal to bring in Asda as the main retail tenant. The issue of the single pitch and what exactly was meant by a community focussed facility needed to be addressed by Council staff in Parks and Community Services.

In working up the detail of specification for the Council facilities with the Parks & Leisure and Development Departments, an Economic Appraisal was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the proposals. This was carried out in accordance with the Northern Ireland Practical Guide to the Green Book (as published by the Department of Finance and Personnel).

Economic Appraisal is considered to be a key tool for achieving value for money and satisfying public accountability requirements and is based on an assessment of needs, objectives, options, costs, benefits, risks, funding, affordability and other factors relevant to spending decisions.

Although the Community & Recreation Committee had previously decided that a community focussed facility and single pitch should be provided, the Economic Appraisal took other factors and changed circumstances into account.

These included:

- **The community consultation, carried out in October 2006;**
 - **which indicated that the sports element was essential and that community meeting rooms would be adequate;**
- **Planning Service's comments regarding the lack of need for significant additional retail space and reduction in open space;**
 - **this has been addressed by the inclusion of Asda as the anchor retailer meaning relocation of nearby retail rather than additional space; with additional family housing proposed for the old Asda site;**
 - **enhanced pitch and play facilities;**
- **The construction of the Grove Wellbeing Centre;**
 - **all of the indoor activities currently provided in the Loughside Recreation Centre are now available at this new facility (which is less than 1 mile away);**
- **The Parks & Leisure Department's Framework for Play Provision in Belfast;**
- **The Development Department's Community Support Plan to facilitate and support community development rather than directly provide community facilities.**

There is a counter argument that the local community were promised by Council officer(s) a more substantial centre but we have been unable to verify who made such a promise, when it was done or what it consisted of. In any event, the substantial decision is that of the Council of January 2007, which is unlikely to obtain planning permission, and on which the Committee is being asked to endorse the change agreed by the Parks & Leisure Committee of 11 May 2009.

Members should also note that the Council is under an obligation to cooperate fully with the developer for the purposes of obtaining planning permission for the overall development proposals.

Resource Implications

FINANCE

Council will accrue a capital receipt of £14.051m (less a £150,000 deposit already paid by the developer) when planning permission is granted and the sale is completed.

The provision of the facilities on the basis recommended by the Economic Appraisal would require an amount of approximately £4.5m of capital funding. Although there would be some ongoing operational revenue expenditure this is not anticipated to be significant as the facility is expected to be managed through an agreement with a local community/sports organisation.

To proceed with the development based on a community focussed building would require a further amount of approximately £750,000 of capital funding, as well as significant ongoing operational revenue expenditure (including staffing costs).

HUMAN RESOURCES

The replacement of Loughside Recreation Centre will result in displacement of staff currently assigned to that location. Therefore, in line with established Council procedures, staff currently based at Loughside Recreation Centre will be offered suitable alternative employment or voluntary redundancy, as appropriate to the circumstances applying.

LOUGHSIDE RECREATION CENTRE: CURRENT USE

Pending project approval by Elected Members, arrangements to offer alternative facilities to current Loughside Recreation Centre and Pitch users during the construction phase of new facilities will be explored by officers.

Recommendations

In essence, based on Council policy and to optimise the chances of obtaining planning permission (although this is by no means certain), it is recommended that the Council should:

- (1) proceed with the development of facilities comprising one grass pitch, one 3G pitch, changing accommodation with attached community rooms, outdoor play areas at Loughside/Mount Vernon, general open space and associated works; and

- 2) consequently, advance the proposal into the 'committed' section of the Capital Programme; subject to planning permission being approved for the overall joint development proposals and payment of the £14.051m capital receipt by Bayshore Developments Ltd. on completion of the sale.

Decision Tracking

The key issue regardless of the extent of community facilities is the matter of obtaining planning permission, otherwise the deal falls and there is no resource for anything.

If we can agree the level of replacement facilities, planning application can be made by Summer."

After a lengthy discussion, it was

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

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations, subject to the inclusion in the development of a community centre in place of community rooms.

On a vote by show of hands five Members voted for the proposal and eight against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Lavery,
Seconded by Councillor Convery,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations in relation to the development at Loughside.

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

Ormeau Business Park Lease, Gasworks Estate

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report in relation to the lease at the Ormeau Business Park to enable legal advice to be obtained and, following which, to receive if necessary representatives of the Board of the Ormeau Business Park.

Proposed Surrender of Lease at Whiterock Close

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the proposed surrender of the lease at Whiterock Close:

“Relevant Background Information

By a 99 year lease dated 29 December 1999 the Council leased approximately 0.74 acres of land at Whiterock Close to the Trustees of Blackmountain Irish Medium School. The lease limits use of the site to ‘school facilities’. Some time in 2005 the school moved its operations to a new location and the land has lain vacant since then.

In the intervening period some of the school Trustees have sought to enter arrangements with the Council to allow commercial development on the site. While seeking to resist this approach officers have also been conscious that voluntary surrender of the lease represented the most appropriate solution for the Council and the local community. The Trustees have recently indicated that they would consider surrender of the lease to the Council.

Engagement with the local community has produced a level of support for the development of mainly community based facilities on undeveloped Council land at Whiterock. Such development could be enhanced by inclusion of the school site and there is local support for the Council in its efforts to either have re-use of the site by the school (in accordance with the terms of the lease), or failing that, to recover possession of the site. This local support has resulted in a willingness by two of the four school Trustees to agree to surrender of the 99 year lease and return the land to Council control. It is understood from the school Principal that the agreement of the remaining Trustees will also be forthcoming.

There are a number of potential benefits to the Council from the availability of this land. These include (subject to budget availability) the potential development of additional car parking for users of the Council’s Leisure Centre and synthetic pitch. The site could also provide greater scope for development of more accessible play facilities for young children. Subject to further consultation with the local community and planning constraints, return of this land could also assist in making portions of the Whiterock site available for limited commercial use.

Since the school vacated the site in 2005 there has been some difficulty in obtaining regular payment of rent. The current rent is £6500 per annum is payable quarterly in advance. The arrears have accumulated over a period of 5 years and although there have been periodic payments made by the individual Trustees, the overall level of arrears has continued to increase. Therefore although the last payment was made in April 2008 (to cover 2006 invoices), the total level of rent arrears now stands at £19,500. The the levels of invoices and arrears accumulated over the period since the site was vacated by the school in 2005 has been circulated for the information of the Members.

Key Issues

- There is potential to recover possession of approximately three quarters of an acre of land, bring it back under Council control, and allow development of comprehensive proposals for the whole Whiterock site.
- While there remains a legal obligation on the individual Trustees in relation to payment of rent it is possible the Trustees will seek waiver of existing rent arrears as part of the arrangements associated with legal surrender of their interest in the site.

Resource Implications

Financial

Under the terms of the 1995 lease there are legal obligations upon the individual school Trustees to pay rent. There are however potential benefits to the Council and the local community in bringing the site back under Council control. The most straightforward means of bringing the site back under Council control is to achieve the voluntary surrender of the Lease by the school Trustees. While rent remains a legal obligation up until the completion of a legal 'Deed of Surrender' (to be signed by the Council and the Trustees) the view of Committee is sought in relation to the treatment of any arrears which may exist once completion of the Surrender is achieved. At the present time it would seem most likely that the present level of arrears would tend to increase rather than decrease between now and completion of the proposed Deed.

Human Resources

Existing staff resource in Legal Services, Estates Management Unit, Parks and Leisure Department and Central Transaction Unit would be required in implementing any decision arrived at by Committee.

Asset and Other Implications

Recovery of the site would enable development of a comprehensive approach to overall site usage. Surrender of the site would absolve the Trustees from the future payment of rent and compliance with other terms of the lease for the next 85 years (being the unexpired term of the lease).

Recommendations

Committee is recommended to accept surrender of the 99 year lease from the Trustees of Blackmountain Irish Medium School through an appropriate legal agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services and to pursue the arrears of rent up to the date on which the Trustees first indicated in writing to the Council that they would agree to surrender the lease (11 March 2009).

Decision Tracking

The Director of Improvement to ensure implementation of the Committee's decision by 31 December 2009."

The Committee agreed:

- (i) to accept the surrender of the 99 year lease from the Trustees of the Blackmountain Irish Medium School through an appropriate legal agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services; and
- (ii) to defer a decision on the pursuance of the arrears of rent to enable further information to be obtained.

Disposal of Lands at Glen Road, Primrose Street and Seapark Drive

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the disposal of a number of portions of land:

"Item 1. Land at Glen Road (adj. St Teresa's GAC)

Background information

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at their meeting on 21 September 2007, agreed in principle to the proposed disposal of an area of land at Glen Road from Belfast City Council to Oaklee Housing Association subject to agreement on the terms of the disposal.

NIHE had nominated Oaklee Housing Association to develop this site for social housing and Oaklee have now prepared a proposed housing scheme, comprising 18 no. social housing units (17 no. general needs houses and 1 no. wheelchair bungalow). The long linear nature and topography of the site has influenced the density and layout of the proposed scheme.

The total site area extends to 1.54 acres, which includes a portion of undeveloped land (0.696 acre) currently forming part a site leased by the Council to St. Teresa's GAC. St Teresa's GAC occupy the adjoining lands for use as playing pitches and a clubhouse, by way of a 99 year lease with the Council. A copy of a map is showing the total site edged red with the St Teresa's GAC portion shaded blue has been circulated. Negotiations have taken place between the Council and St Teresa's GAC regarding the surrender of this portion of their leased site in return for a premium. St Teresa's GAC have recently indicated their agreement in principle to this surrender subject to agreement on the detailed terms.

The land has been independently valued for the Council, and following protracted negotiations with Oaklee Housing Association a purchase price of £750,000 has been provisionally agreed for the 1.54 acre site. The net receipt to the Council will be less the premium payable to St. Teresa's GAC. The details of the terms of the surrender by St. Teresa's GAC of the leased portion of the site are still to be finalised, but discussions to date regarding the premium have been based on 25% of the freehold value of *their* portion of the site (which equates to approx £85,000). The assessment of the premium will also be subject to independent valuation. The details of the terms agreed with St. Teresa's GAC will however be reported back to Committee.

The Council's Traveller Liaison Site Office and a portacabin leased to An Munia Tober as a playgroup facility are located to the east of the site, but this area is excluded from the proposed sale to Oaklee Housing Association, and access to this area will be maintained as a condition of the sale.

This site, which fronts onto the main Glen Road, is currently lying derelict and has been subject to anti-social behaviour in the past.

Key issues:

- Proposed disposal to Oaklee Housing Association of 1.54 acre site at £750,000, less premium payable to St. Teresa's GAC for surrender of a portion of their leased site.
- Proposed social housing scheme of 18 no. units on an area of derelict land.

Resource Implications:

Financial: The sale of these lands will result in a capital return to the Council of £750,000, less the premium payable to St. Teresa's GAC, which could be used in furtherance of the City Investment Fund or other corporate priorities.

Assets: The development of this land for social housing will meet a demand in this area; will bring improvements from an environmental and aesthetic perspective and will provide a capital return for a surplus asset, according with effective asset management.

Human Resources: None at this time

Item 1 Recommendation:

Committee are asked to approve the disposal of the land to Oaklee Housing Association for the sum of £750,000 subject to detailed terms being agreed by the Estates Management Unit and Legal Services; and also subject to agreement being reached with St. Teresa's GAC on the premium for the surrender of a portion of their leased site, and the details of the terms agreed with St. Teresa's GAC will be reported back to Committee in due course.

Decision Tracking:

The Director of Improvement to ensure that the disposal process is followed up within six months of the Committee decision.

Item 2. Disposal of former Civic Amenity Sites at Primrose Street and Seapark Drive:

Background:

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, at their meeting on 24 January 2008, declared the former civic amenity sites at Primrose Street and Seapark Drive surplus to Council requirements and granted approval to placing the premises for sale on the open market.

The Primrose Street site, which extends to approximately 0.087 acres, is located off Crumlin Road, and comprises a small enclosed yard area with adjoining stores. The premises adjoin a small area of vacant land (approx 0.032 acre) which is owned by Ligoniel Pigeon Society Social Club. A location map has been circulated, with the overall site edged red and the Pigeon Club portion shaded blue. The Pigeon Club land was also surplus to their requirements

and it was therefore marketed simultaneously with the Council's land on the basis that the proceeds from the disposal and the costs of marketing and sale would be apportioned on a pro-rata basis. The Pigeon Club land is subject to a restrictive covenant that it is to be used as open space but the solicitors for the Pigeon Club have advised that they are in the process of having this restriction removed. The Pigeon Club are solely responsible for all costs associated with the removal of the restrictive covenant.

The Seapark Drive site, which extends to approximately 0.06 acres, is located in a residential area close to Shore Road. It comprises a small enclosed yard area with adjoining stores. A location map has been circulated.

The two premises were placed on the open market with O'Connor Kennedy Turtle Chartered Surveyors and have now been on the market for more than a year. Primrose Street was initially marketed at offers in the region of £225,000 for both the Council premises and the adjoining area of land owned by the Pigeon Club; and Seapark Drive was initially marketed at offers in the region of £125,000.

Despite being on the market for more than a year there has been very little interest in the premises until recently and offers have recently been received via the agents in respect of both premises.

An offer of £115,000 has been received for Primrose Street (inc the adjoining portion of land owned by the Pigeon Club). The bidder has indicated that the offer is not conditional upon planning or funding, but is conditional upon the successful release of the restrictive covenant over the lands owned by the Pigeon Club. A pro-rata apportionment of the sale price based on the site area would give a sum of £85,000 in respect of the Council's portion.

An offer of £70,500 has been received for Seapark Drive, and the bidder has advised that this is not conditional upon planning or finance.

Both bidders have indicated that they propose to use the premises as stores in the short to medium term with the prospect of redeveloping as small infill housing sites in the longer term.

The agents have confirmed that the premises have been extensively advertised on their website and Property News website and details have been sent out to the agent's database of developers and the main Housing Associations on a number of occasions.

The bids received are obviously significantly lower than the original marketing figures but the economic downturn and lack of finance has had an adverse impact on the property market and the level of demand across all sectors. The subject premises have been exposed to the market for some time and there has been very limited interest. In terms of the offers as received, the agents have advised that given the continuing contraction of the residential and commercial property markets within the economy's overall slide into recession, that the current offers received in respect of both premises are within the range of figures they would expect the sites to achieve in the current climate.

Key Issues:

- Proposed disposal of two surplus assets at total £155,500.
- Bidders have advised that their offers are not subject to planning or obtaining finance.

Resources:

Financial: The sale of these assets will result in a capital return to the Council of a total sum of £155,500, which could be used in furtherance of the City Investment Fund or other corporate priorities.

Assets: The future re-use of these two surplus assets for proposed industrial/business type purposes (in the shorter term) represents a better use than their current vacant status, and any future re-development for housing should fulfil a demand in the area. It should also lead to a decrease in anti social behaviour at these two sites; and will provide a capital return for two surplus assets, according with effective asset management.

Human Resources: None at present.

Recommendation:

Committee are asked to approve the disposal of the former civic amenity sites at Primrose Street and Seapark Drive, as outlined above, subject to detailed terms being agreed by the Estates Management Unit and Legal Services.

Decision Tracking:

The Director of Improvement to ensure that the disposal process is followed up within six months of the Committee decision."

During discussion, the Director of Improvement pointed out that he had received recently confirmation from representatives of St. Theresa's Gaelic Athletic Club the terms under which they would be prepared to surrender the lease. The amount which had been requested was £103,000, which equated to approximately 27% of the freehold value of the Club's portion of the site.

The Committee agreed to the disposal of the lands at Glen Road, Primrose Street and Seapark Drive on the terms outlined.

Good Relations and Equality

The Committee approved the minutes of the Good Relations Partnership of 12th June and adopted the recommendations contained therein and in particular in relation to the following:

Specification for the Procurement of Services Under Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Committee adopted the recommendation of the Good Relations Partnership to approve the invitation of tenders for the following key actions:

<u>Key Actions</u>	<u>Indicative Budget</u>
	£
4.1 Citizen Education Programme	180,000
4.2 Voluntary and Community Training	180,000

The Committee adopted also the Partnership's decision to:

- approve in principle the specifications relating to key actions within the Plan;
- note the invitations for Independent Members of the Partnership to observe the Tender Assessment Panel; and
- invite the Special European Union Programmes Body to send a representative to observe the Panel.

The Committee noted that the contracts would be awarded on the basis of the most advantageous tender received based on pre-agreed evaluation criteria.

Commemorations and Memorabilia Working Group

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Commemorations and Memorabilia Working Group of 20th May and agreed that the Working Group be advised that no recommendations would be adopted by the Council until such times as a report on all the actions which had been agreed in relation to the location of memorabilia in the City Hall had been submitted to the Committee for consideration, thereby providing the Members with an overall view of the proposals.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Responses to Notice of Motion: Job Losses

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at a Special Meeting on 9th April, had passed a Notice of Motion in relation to job losses at Visteon, Bombardier Shorts, FG Wilson, Nortel and Hughes Christensen and had agreed that correspondence be forwarded to the Executive requesting it to introduce a co-ordinated Ministerial response to job losses in the City.

The Principal Committee Administrator reported that responses to the Notice of Motion had been received from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and from the Chairman of Ford of Europe.

The Committee noted receipt of the correspondence.

New Regional Hospital for Women and Children Working Group

The Committee noted the minutes of the meetings of the New Regional Hospital for Women and Children Working Group of 21st April and 19th May.

Sustainable Development Steering Group Action Plan 2009-2011

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

From a corporate standpoint, Belfast City Council continues to acknowledge sustainable development as its overarching strategic objective and has committed therefore, to taking an instrumental role in improving the quality of life now and for future generations of the people in Belfast by helping to make the city a better place to live in, work in, invest in, and visit.

The Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011 contributes towards the achievement of this objective by setting out the key issues that the Council wants to address in coming years. Under the strategic theme of ‘Better care for Belfast’s environment - a clean, green city now and for the future’, the Council’s Sustainable Development Steering Group proposed an indicative action of reviewing and updating the Sustainable Development Action Plan 2006 - 2009, with a principal focus upon environmental initiatives. Accordingly, a new Sustainable Development Action Plan has been developed by this cross-departmental group, which substantially builds upon the seven work themes addressed through the 2006 - 2009 plan.

The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, which has overarching responsibility for sustainable development within Northern Ireland, published the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2006, supported by an interim Implementation Plan. OFMDFM has indicated that a review of the strategy is currently underway with a view to producing a new Sustainable Development Strategy, which will act as an enabling mechanism for the development of a second Sustainable Development Implementation Plan.

In order to ensure that sustainable development continues to be embedded within local authority actions, a sustainable development statutory duty was introduced from 31 March 2007. This duty requires that a public authority must, in exercising its functions, act in the way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland, except to the extent that it considers that any such action is not reasonably practicable. The duty also requires that a public authority must have regard to any strategy or other guidance relating to sustainable development, issued by the Department of the Environment.

Key Issues

The 2009 - 2011 Sustainable Development Steering Group Action Plan for Belfast City Council comprises seven priority action areas as follows:-

Implementation and refinement of environmental management systems

This section of the action plan provides continuing support for the implementation of environmental management systems such as BS 8555:2003 and BS EN ISO 14001. The plan will assist the implementation process by undertaking audits of key stages of the environmental management system and by integrating environmental management practices within the business planning process. The structured approach to environmental management will also contribute towards reducing the Council's energy consumption and waste generation.

Key Issues contd

Green Procurement

Actions within this section of the plan are designed to mainstream the Council's 'green procurement' policy by encouraging Departments to assess the environmental aspects of their tenders and quotations. The plan also proposes

collaborative working between the Procurement Unit and Waste Management Service in order to deliver aspects of the Council's internal waste strategy. Finally, the plan proposes actions to assist Council suppliers to address the adverse environmental impacts of their services and supplies.

Energy Conservation

The Climate Change Act 2008 established a target of ensuring that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline. In order to ensure that appropriate progress towards this target is achieved, the UK government has tasked DEFRA with identifying those business sectors with significant greenhouse gas emissions and applying appropriate control mechanisms. This increasing governmental emphasis upon energy conservation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been reflected within the 2009-2011 plan. The plan outlines actions for developing a Carbon Emission Reduction Plan, achieving the Department of Finance and Personnel Public Sector Energy Campaign targets, complying with the requirements of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive in relation to display energy certificates, and participating in the statutory Carbon Reduction Commitment emissions trading scheme. The plan also contains proposals to participate in the adoption of a Northern Ireland Local Government declaration on climate change and to develop a prioritised action plan to address the causes and consequences of climate change within Belfast. The Council has already adopted a '% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from Council premises' primary performance indicator within its 2008-2011 Corporate Plan.

Waste Management

The waste management section of the action plan commits the Council to reducing its waste production to 90% of 2006 levels by 2012 via the implementation of the Internal Waste Strategy. The Internal Waste Strategy contains commitments to the delivery and extension of the internal recycling scheme across Council properties, completion of a waste characterisation survey, and ensuring that the Council fulfils its statutory obligations in relation to waste management duty of care.

Green Transport

This section of the action plan commits the Council to introducing a new fuel management system for fleet vehicles and to establishing indicators for efficient fuel consumption. Furthermore, there is a requirement for the Council to evaluate the applicability of emerging engine technologies and fuels. Regular emissions testing of the fleet will continue and workplace travel opportunities for Belfast City Council employees will be developed as a component of a revised 2009 Council Transport Policy.

Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement

Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement is concerned with conserving priority species and habitats across Belfast and raising awareness of biodiversity. This is to be achieved by implementing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, reviewing the Open Space Strategy, producing an Urban Forestry Strategy, and developing an 'access to heritage' strategy for the Ulster Hall.

Sustainable Development Communication

Achieving many of the objectives proposed within the 2009-2011 Sustainable Development Action Plan will require the support of managers and staff. It has been recognised that managers require timely, accurate, and meaningful information in order to implement effective sustainable development management practices that deliver economic, operational, and environmental efficiencies. Therefore, as part of its communication commitment, the SDSG will introduce monitoring and reporting practices in order to provide appropriate performance data to managers. Additionally, the Council will continue its participation on the Belfast Fairtrade Steering Group in order to ensure that the City maintains its joint Fairtrade accreditation from the UK and Irish Fairtrade foundations.

Progress with the 2009 - 2011 SDSG Action Plan will be monitored using Sharepoint project management software and contributions to corporate performance indicators will be assessed via the CorVu performance management system. Annual progress reports will be submitted to the Chief Officers' Management Team and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

Resource Implications

Appendix A of the Action Plan describes in detail those actions and projects to be delivered during the 2009 - 2011 Action Plan in terms of objectives, milestones, timeframes, key performance questions, resource requirements and risks. Where it has not been possible to characterise fully the resource requirements associated with a particular action or project, the Sustainable Development Steering Group seeks Committee adoption of that proposal in principle, subject to the submission of a more detailed report to the Committee prior to the project's commencement. Such reports will include an assessment of all financial, human resource and asset resource requirements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve adoption and implementation of the Sustainable Development Steering Group Action Plan 2009-2011.

Key to Abbreviations

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| BS8555:2003 – | Environmental management systems - Guide to the phased implementation of an environmental management system including the use of environmental performance evaluation. |
| BS EN ISO14001 – | Environmental management systems - Requirements with guidance for use. |
| DEFRA – | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. |
| OFMDFM - | Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. |
| SDSG - | Sustainable Development Steering Group.” |

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Chairman