

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 4th September, 2009

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hartley (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Lavery); and
Councillors D. Browne, Campbell, Crozier, Hendron,
N. Kelly, C. Maskey, P. Maskey, F. McCann, Newton,
Rodgers, Rodway and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Improvement;
Mr. C. Quigley, Director of Legal Services;
Mr. T. Salmon, Director of Corporate Services;
Mrs. J. Minne, Head of Human Resources;
Mr. S. McCrory, Principal Committee Administrator; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Adamson, Attwood, M. Browne, W. Browne and Convery.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 7th and 21st August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st September, subject to:

- (i) the omission of that portion of the minute of the meeting of 7th August under the heading "Consultation on Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill" in so far as it related to the Council's response to Part 1 of the Bill (Contracts and Compulsory Purchase) which, at the request of Councillor Crozier, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration;
- (ii) the amendment of the minute of the meeting of 7th August under the heading "Department of the Environment Consultation on Planning Reform" to provide that a meeting of the Council's Belfast Flooding Members' Group be convened as a matter of urgency to discuss the recent flooding in the City;
- (iii) the amendment of the minute of the meeting of 7th August under the heading "Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults" to provide that consideration be given to the requirement to provide appropriate training for Elected Members and that a report thereon be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee;

- (iv) the amendment of the minute of the meeting under the heading "Request for the use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality" to provide that the Belfast Education and Library Board be granted free use of the City Hall and be provided with civic hospitality up to a maximum of £1,000; and
- (v) the amendment of the minute of the meeting of 21st August under the heading "Options for Reducing Carbonaceous Emissions from the Council's Vehicle Fleet" to provide that the report to be submitted to the Committee contain details of the financial implications for the Council of any proposals in both the short and longer terms.

**Consultation on Local Government
(Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill**

The Committee noted that this matter, which had been referred back by the Council at the request of Councillor Crozier, would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 18th September.

Finance

**Financial Update - Budget Review
and Voluntary Redundancy Exercise**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August, Members were informed that the financial position of the council had worsened due to factors beyond its control. This would likely lead to a very difficult budget process for 2010/11. In order to manage this position the Committee agreed to conduct a comprehensive mini budget review which would:

- **Identify the likely financial position at the end of the current financial year;**
- **Review all budget heads to identify areas where expenditure is unlikely to happen or where underspends are likely;**
- **Identify options for political consideration for reducing expenditure both in 2009/10 and 2010/11; and**
- **Produce a high level budget strategy and projection for 2010/11.**
- **At the same Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting it was also agreed to initiate a trawl for voluntary redundancies so that rightsizing could be considered in the context of the mini budget review.**

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide a timeline for the completion of the comprehensive mini budget review.
- Propose an approach to the implementation of the voluntary redundancy exercise and agree the principles which will apply to the process.

Key Issues

Budget Review

A budget review group has been established to complete the comprehensive mini budget review. It is proposed that the work of this group will be reported to the cross party Budget and Transformation Panel in early October and then to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee later the same month. This means that Members will be afforded more time to consider potential options for the setting of the rate for 2010/11. A more detailed timeline is provided at appendix one. It is also recommended that the budget review group is tasked with providing options on how best the financial implications of the voluntary redundancy exercise, which is discussed in the next section of this report, may be addressed.

In addition to the comprehensive mini budget review, there are a number of efficiency projects happening in the council. The savings emanating from this work need to be agreed in time for these to be considered as part of the estimate setting process for 2010/11. The review of the centre is one of the key efficiency projects which has the potential to generate significant savings. A separate report on this work will be considered at today's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

Voluntary Redundancies

A key aim of the Review of the Centre report is the need in the current economic climate to provide greater value for money. One of the key efficiency measures which will have to be considered is staffing costs and the requirement to consider proportionate measures to reduce these costs in the short term without adversely affecting front line service delivery to the public. In order to rightsize the organisation consideration should be given to voluntary redundancies.

It is essential that the initiation and implementation of the voluntary redundancy exercise is managed effectively and consistently on agreed principles. It is proposed therefore that the following principles will be applied:

1. Consultations with Trade Unions will start as soon as possible.
2. The exercise will be undertaken centrally by corporate HR through the Management Side of the Council's Joint Consultative Committee and Chief Officers' Management Team.
3. The criteria for considering VR should include
 - Council retains the right to decide who can be released, ensuring that essential skills and expertise are maintained
 - The decision is dependent on the needs of the council
 - The VR will avoid the need for compulsory redundancy
 - The employee's post must be redundant or a one to one transferred redundancy* can be identified with a clear audit trail linking the person to be redundant with the post to be deleted.
 - The potential for redeployment
 - Prioritisation of VR requests will be based on available finance and the level of savings which will be delivered.
 - All other relevant options have been considered.

*In the case of transferred redundancy, the employee to be transferred must have undertaken a broadly similar role in their former post and met the specification for the post without the need for retraining

In terms of implementation it proposed that the Council carries out the following steps:

1. Identify those employees currently in a redundancy situation (i.e. supernumerary pool) and offer these employees VR on time bound basis
2. Consider redeployment options for any remaining supernumerary employees on a time bound basis
3. Consider compulsory redundancy for those left in the supernumerary pool on a time bound basis
4. Identify any other 'at risk' groups, e.g. those affected by review of centre, ongoing operational reviews, and those sections who have incurred significant revenue losses.

5. If necessary, prioritise those who will be invited to express an interest in VR, based on the number of structural reviews and the stage at which these reviews are.
6. Invite applications from the 'at risk' groups.
7. Decide who can be released on VR, taking into account the agreed principles and criteria.
8. Approve VRs observing the statutory dispute legislation.
9. Consider the need to issue a wider trawl across the council to those outside the 'at risk' groups. (This would only be appropriate when a transferred redundancy situation can be identified).
10. Invite applications from outside the 'at risk' group.
11. If trawls for VR do not result in sufficient numbers being released, then consider compulsory redundancy in accordance with the redundancy policy which may need to be reviewed.

In order to ensure that the savings arising from the above VR exercise are captured it is essential that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee maintains tight control over council staff numbers. For this reason, a report on the movement of staff numbers will be provided to the committee on a quarterly basis.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree the following:

1. The timeline for completing the comprehensive mini budget review as outlined in the report.
2. The budget review group to provide Members with options for financing the VR exercise.
3. The approach to initiating and implementing a VR exercise.
4. The principles upon which the VR exercise will be based."

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed, upon the request of the individual Party Groups, to the holding of briefings on the matter. The Committee agreed also that the cost of the Council's postage be taken into consideration during the review of the budget.

Asset Management

Governance of Major Projects

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the governance of major projects:

“Relevant Background Information

In an increasingly challenging financial environment, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has recognised the need for greater organisational controls over the main financial risks within the Council. One of the biggest risks is the authorisation of spend on major projects and the governance of the project to ensure it is delivered on time and on budget.

In November 2008, the Local Government Auditor noted in his Annual Report that the Council had identified the governance of major projects such as Connswater Community Greenway, the new cemetery, Titanic Signature project and large capital builds as a key risk for the organisation. Such projects run financial risks of millions of pounds, through various factors, such as ill-defined decision making processes and paths, variation control, an aggressively litigious procurement environment as well as the normal risks to physical projects such as contamination, planning delay and so on that result in time, cost and specification underperformance. The need for Council to work increasingly with partners in delivering potential city-wide projects, e.g. Crusaders/Newington Sports Village, Tommy Patton/Blanchflower development and potential North, South, East and West projects etc., only adds to the above risk and ultimately to the Council’s reputation and credibility.

As part of the debate on the corporate plan at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June 2009, the Chief Executive informed Members that a review of the arrangements in place to deliver major projects had been commissioned to ensure that the role of the Committee in ensuring delivery and budget was assured.

The purpose of this report is to present to Members the findings of this review and to make a number of recommendations for improvement. The review was carried out by a leading firm in this field – Drivers Jonas.

Key Issues

The review examined the current arrangements in the council for managing major projects. Major projects were defined at the outset as those projects which significantly affect the Council's budget, reputation and/or operation.

The key findings of the review are as follows:

- The current governance arrangements for major projects are fragmented across the council and this is due to the responsibility for projects resting across different departments and committees.
- The skills which the organisation need to bring together to make significant projects work currently sits across at least three departments.
- The role of Strategic Policy and Resource Committee in relation to cost control and oversight of project governance needs to be clarified and strengthened.
- The officer with whom overall responsibility rests for a particular project is not always clear.
- There is a lack of coherence in dealing with external parties.
- New governance arrangements are needed to ensure the most effective use of limited resources.
- Clearer roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for major projects need to be established.

Drivers Jonas have made a number of recommendations which are in line with the recommended government best practice guidance which is known as, 'Office of Government Commerce Portfolio, Programme and Project Management best practice (P3O)'. The key recommendations of the review are as follows:

- The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee should have overall responsibility for the allocation of resources and strategic oversight of major projects.
- COMT should provide officer oversight for all major projects.
- Every major project should have a named responsible officer as a client.
- The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, COMT and responsible officers should be supported by a director who has the relevant project management skills to ensure delivery.
- This director should be supported by a team with project/programme management expertise.
- The team should be a source of good practice for all projects across the council.
- The adoption of Gateway risk rating to identify and categorise major projects risk status.

The successful implementation of the recommendations made by Drivers Jonas is dependent on changes being made to the organisation structure. For this reason the organisational implications of the recommendations have been incorporated into the review of the centre report which will be discussed at today's meeting as part of a separate report. At this stage, therefore, Members are only being asked to agree in principle to the recommendations as outlined above and to consider the implementation issues as part of the review of the centre report.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree to the following:

1. Note the findings of the Drivers Jonas report.
2. Agree in principle to the recommendations as outlined above.
3. Consider the implementation issues as part of the review of the centre report."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Modernisation and Improvement

Review of the Centre - Organisation Structures

(At this point in the meeting all officers present, with the exception of the Chief Executive, the Director of Legal Services and the Head of Human Resources, left the room whilst this item was discussed.)

The Chief Executive submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report in relation to the Review of the Centre of the Organisation:

"Relevant Background Information

1. Members will recall receiving a report at their meeting on 19 June 2009 in relation to the review of the centre of the organisation. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix 1. As this report made clear, the aim of the review is to set at a high level the creation of an effective corporate centre that fully supports the Council's requirements whilst at the same time providing value for money.
2. In essence the review of the centre is a rolling programme of reviews involving those parts of the organisation that provide support to frontline services. This includes Corporate Services, including HR, ISB, Audit, Risk and Governance, and Business Improvement; the Council Improvement Unit; Legal Services; and Members' Services.

3. The most urgent priority for the review is to establish a programme of work which seeks to provide solutions in relation to:
 - How savings can be delivered at the centre of the organisation with a minimal effect on frontline service provision which will aid the Council's financial ability to maintain a low rate and provide resources to fund its capital programme aspirations.
 - Providing the Council with an organisational structure at senior officer level to support implementation arrangements for the Review of Public Administration and ensuring that the organisation is fit to deliver post RPA.

Key Issues

4. At present the Chief Officers' Management Team is in transition with a newly appointed Director of Finance and Resources due to take up her post on 1 November 2009 and a recruitment exercise underway for a new Director of Development following the present Director's resignation. In addition, the Director of Health and Environmental Services will be eligible to retire from Christmas onwards and finally two of the present Directors are employed on an interim basis with one of them responsible for an interim departmental structure.

In addition, the human resource impacts of the Review of Public Administration are about to take real effect. Negotiations are presently underway at a regional level on the arrangements for moving Councils from their present staffing structure to the staffing structures which will need to be put in place for the new Councils post 2011. Whilst Belfast City Council is not merging with another Council, there is a real risk that Council staff will be encouraged to apply for new posts in the new Councils given that they will be larger organisations with bigger budgets. It is therefore vital that the Council establishes as early as possible permanent positions for its senior staff to ensure continuity of delivery and leadership up to May 2011.

5. The Committee also considered the implementation structure for the review of the centre and preparations for RPA. This involved the creation of a Budget and Transformation Panel drawn from Members of all the political parties supported by an officer Budget and Transformation Board and an implementation team which would be supported by an external

Change Manager. This team would then carry out a number of service reviews of Finance, Projects and Corporate Systems, Members' Services, Central Business Support Units, Human Resources, Building Maintenance, Vehicle Maintenance etc and report through the Members' Budget and Transformation Panel to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

6. A full copy of the high level Review Report has been circulated with this report. Briefings on the detail of the report will continue to be offered to individual party groups.
7. At today's meeting, Members will also be considering reports on the Budget Review and Voluntary Redundancy exercise and the role of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in relation to the governance of major projects. Both of these issues obviously impact on the Review of the Centre Report and a number of decisions are required to move these issues forward.
8. One of the key findings of the Review of the Centre Report is a recognition that the 'fit for purpose' activities led by the Core Improvement Team have largely been completed.

Initially the Improvement Directorate was established as the Core Improvement Team on an interim basis to support the Council's improvement agenda. It was set up at no additional cost to the ratepayer by re-aligning existing budgets for the Chief Executive's and Corporate Services Departments. Its work over the past few years has concentrated on working with other parts of the Council to develop, align and integrate the building blocks required by the organisation to deliver its priorities and to meet the challenges of the Review of Public Administration. Priority has been given over this time to strategic policy, planning and performance, customer focus, resource allocation, programme management and HR. Significant time has also been spent on the efficiency programme, changing the governance arrangements and organisational development work with Members, COMT and senior management. The Improvement Directorate also provides policy support and research to the Chief Executive and the Review of Public Administration.

9. As a result of the need to ensure that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had the necessary financial oversight over procurement, estate and asset management, these functions were also made the responsibility of the Director of Improvement.

Members, however, now need to consider three issues which impact directly on the future of the interim Improvement Department. These are:

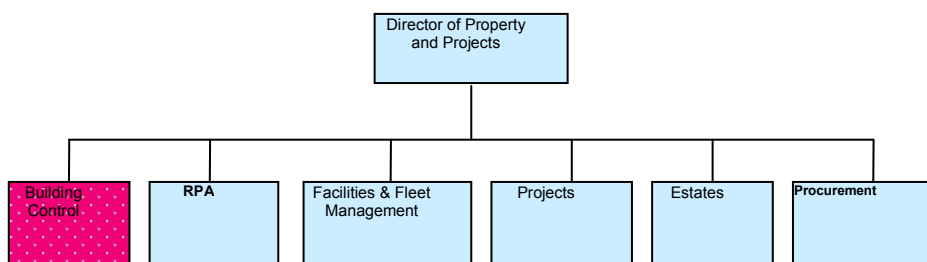
- (1) Alignment of facilities management and major projects with asset management. Sector Projects, as part of the review of the centre, have highlighted the fact that the management of issues relating to property and assets are spread across a number of departments. Facilities Management sits in Corporate Services, asset management and the capital programme are covered by the Improvement Department and the delivery of major projects is shared across all departments. It is argued that this is not the most appropriate arrangement to secure the efficient and effective management of property and assets.**
- (2) The governance of major projects review carried out by Drivers Jonas and conducted in response to a concern raised by the Local Government Auditor about the risks associated with major projects is also being reported to the Committee today. The review highlights the following issues:**
 - The current governance arrangements for major projects are fragmented across the Council and this is due to the responsibility for projects resting across different departments and committees.**
 - The skills which the organisation need to bring together to make significant projects work currently sits across at least three departments.**
 - The role of Strategic Policy and Resource Committee in relation to project governance needs to be clarified and strengthened.**
 - The officer with whom overall responsibility rests for a particular project is not always clear.**
 - There is a lack of coherence in dealing with external parties.**
 - New governance arrangements are needed to ensure the most effective use of limited resources.**
 - Clearer roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for major projects need to be established.**

The Drivers Jonas review goes on to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, COMT and responsible officers should be supported by a director who has the relevant project and programme management skills to ensure the successful delivery of major projects.

- (3) The Review of the Centre Report acknowledges that the CIT team has made considerable progress in contributing to the development of the key corporate systems, processes and frameworks which are required to ensure the Council operates as a corporate entity and a high performing organisation in time for the RPA; it states however, that the point has now been reached where the functions carried out by the Core Improvement Team should be anchored in the organisation and treated as business as usual.
10. Given these three major issues, the Review of the Centre recommends that the Council establishes a directorate of Property and Projects reporting directly to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee with the director having responsibility for all property related functions and the capital programme, major council-wide programmes such as the RPA and city investment strategy and asset management plan. This will enable the Committee to better exploit the synergies between the development of new assets and the management of existing ones particularly in the areas of project and programme management and contract management. It will also lead to more effective alignment of asset management to the efficiency and transformation programme and the implementation of the customer focus strategy.

The Review also recommends that Members give consideration to including the Building Control function to this directorate. The economic downturn has put pressure on the income raised through Building Control fees. At the same time, this has presented opportunities to use the competencies and skills of Building Control staff in other areas such as the successful vacant property exercise carried out in conjunction with Land and Property Services and the rates projection work used as part of the Titanic Signature Project bid. These skills could be further used in working with the Director of Property and Projects on property and rate base work.

11. The Review of Public Administration will be the Council's biggest project for the next couple of years. While the Chief Executive has overall responsibility for RPA, and all of the COMT need to be involved in developing policy, the organisation needs a director to manage the work on an on-going project management basis. Currently, this responsibility lies with the Director of Improvement. If Members accept the creation of the Director of Property and Projects the Director of Improvement post will cease to exist in the organisation structure. It is therefore recommended that responsibility for RPA is given to the new Director of Property and Projects as it is a major corporate project.
12. One business support unit should be established to service the directorate. Further work will be required to determine the size and structure of the business support unit. In summary the structure of the new directorate of Property and Projects would be as follows with Building Control included as an additional option:



The creation of the directorate would create minimal disruption as, in the first instance, structures below the director level would remain unchanged. The new director would then have the opportunity to explore synergies across the functions.

Should Members agree to the establishment of the directorate then the job description, grading and appropriate method of filling of the Director of Property and Projects must be progressed. As we approach RPA there will be the need for more flexibility in the functions which senior officers are responsible for. The Council has already agreed that a generic term should be inserted as a condition of employment for the new Director of Development post, which will permit the Council to amend the Director's responsibilities to ensure that the emerging changes required under the Review of Public Administration can be accommodated. It is recommended that such a clause be inserted into the job description for the proposed post.

13. Members may be aware however that four key RPA HR issues (i.e. vacancy control; filling posts in new organisations; staff transfers; and severance) are currently being negotiated through the Local Government Reform Joint Forum with detailed guidance being developed. It is important to consider what the impact of these matters, and in particular the vacancy control process, may have on Belfast City Council.

The proposed vacancy control scheme which is likely to come into effect on a phased basis on 1 October 2009 recommends that councils should seek to fill a vacancy from at risk staff in the following order of consideration before resorting to public advertisement:

- at risk staff in the individual council
- at risk staff in the amalgamated council cluster
- at risk staff across all the 26 councils
- at risk staff across all the sectors in the RPA Affected Group.

In addition to considering the RPA related HR matters outlined, the filling of this post must be considered within the context of the Council's restructuring and right-sizing exercise. Members are therefore asked to delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Budget and Transformation Panel to fill this post in the most appropriate manner following full consideration of all RPA, legal, equality and financial implications.

Strategic Planning, Consultation and Research and Corporate Planning would return to report directly to the Chief Executive.

14. Other Immediate Actions

As noted earlier in the report it is essential that the savings emanating from the review of the centre are identified and captured early enough to be included in the rate setting process for 2010/11. One of the necessary first steps is to ensure that the Human Resources service has the capacity and capability to provide the support required to deliver the recommendations relating to the review of the centre as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Sector Projects have therefore recommended that the Human Resources service is immediately reviewed in the context of the following:

- The development of the HR service's custodianship of job descriptions

- The further development of its role in organisational development, and in particular structural reform, and controlling staff numbers
- High level analysis of impact on the HR service as a result of RPA
- The identification of potential savings.

15. Retirement of the Director of Corporate Services

The Council's policy on Pension and Discretionary Compensation Payments as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, 17 November 2007, allows for a compensation payment to be made where there is an economic and/or operational reason to do so. Given the current Finance, HR and IT agendas and the initiation of a new approach to the provision of these crucial support functions, recently highlighted by the review of the centre; the future required programme of work to implement the review of the centre; and the recent recruitment of the Director of Finance and Resources who is commencing work at the start of Nov 2009, it is proposed that a compensatory payment equivalent to 10 months added pension at a cost of £26,673 is made to the Director of Corporate Services on the basis that he will retire from the Council on 31 October 2009. Given the differential in total salary costs between the current Director of Corporate Services and the starting point of the newly appointed Director of Finance and Resources, the amount would be paid for by the end of the next financial year.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree the following:

1. To establish a directorate of Property and Projects with the director having responsibility for all property related functions and the capital programme, major council-wide programmes such as the RPA and city investment strategy and asset management plan.
2. To delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Budget and Transformation Panel to fill this post in the most appropriate manner following full consideration of all RPA, legal, equality and financial implications.

3. **To implement a more generic approach to directors' job role and state in each of their job descriptions and conditions of service that the functional responsibilities and duties may be amended to permit flexibility to deal with RPA.**
4. **To undertake a review of the HR service as outlined at Appendix 3, copies of which have been circulated.**
5. **To make a compensation payment equivalent to 10 months added pension to the Director of Corporate Services in accordance with the Council's policy on Pension and Discretionary Compensation Payments."**

The Chief Executive highlighted the main issues contained within the report and indicated that he wished, in particular, to draw the Committee's attention to the following three matters:

- the timing of the retirement of the Director of Corporate Services and the proposal to make a discretionary payment of £26,673, equivalent to ten months added pension, in accordance with the Council policy on redundancy and discretionary compensation payments;
- the post of the Director of Property and Projects. At this stage he was unable to provide the Members with final details in relation to the recruitment of the post because the vacancy control procedure, which would be introduced as part of the Review of Public Administration, was being negotiated currently through the Local Government Joint Forum and was likely to come into effect on 1st October, 2009; and
- the placing of the Building Control Section within the Organisational Structure. He pointed out that there were no proposals being made at this stage in this regard but that the issue should be considered more fully at a later stage.

The Chief Executive then answered a number of questions from the Members in relation to the compensatory payment to be made to the Director of Corporate Services and confirmed that there were economic and operational reasons to justify the payment in accordance with Council policy. The Chief Executive undertook to submit a report to the Committee in due course to seek agreement on the recruitment process for the post of Director of Property and Projects.

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

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations as set out in the report and that Party Group briefings or briefings for individual Members take place during September for those who so requested them.

On a vote by show of hands thirteen Members voted for the proposal and none against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Transition Committee Business

Review of Public Administration Initial Transition Plan

The Committee was advised that, following the recent Review of Public Administration Workshop which had been held for the Members of the Committee on 17th August and the subsequent circulation of a roadmap/timetable, a more detailed management implementation plan had been developed. It was intended that the initial plan would form the basis of a Forward Work Plan for the Committee, setting out those important Review of Public Administration related issues which needed to be taken forward.

The Chief Executive pointed out that, inevitably, the level of Review of Public Administration related activity would grow in intensity and scope throughout the transition period and that its management and delivery must be adequately resourced and co-ordinated. The Chief Officers were committed to supporting the Transition Committee in its role in driving forward the transition process and ensuring that appropriate implementation structures were in place. It was important to recognise that within every change process there would be uncertainty and unforeseen circumstances would inevitably arise. Planning was a process of constant review, re-prioritisation and the refining and refocusing of effort and resources in line with shifting demands and needs. Whilst Council officers would plan ahead in terms of what was needed, the Transition Plan should be viewed as a live document which would be updated continually to enable changes to be managed in the external programme of work or to take account of important ad-hoc issues as they arose.

The Chief Executive explained that monthly progress update reports would be submitted for the consideration of the Committee, with an assessment against targets which would be illustrated through the use of the traffic light (red, amber, green) performance model. That would provide Members with a clear indication of the degree of progress of each key strand of work and would flag up any issues/areas of concern.

Key Milestones

Some of the short-term indicative milestones in the Review of Public Administration process were as follows:

September, 2009

- a draft communications and engagement plan would be submitted to the Committee for consideration;
- a draft response to the reform of the Northern Ireland Planning System would be submitted also;
- a Belfast public consultation event entitled "Reform of the Northern Ireland Planning System" was scheduled to be held on 11th September;
- final Ministerial agreement around the transfer of functions and the reconfiguration of local government boundaries; and
- consultation on the draft Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, which would dictate significantly the future shape and operation of Councils post-Review of Public Administration;

October, 2009

- a staff vacancy control system would be introduced which would impact upon the filling of new posts within the existing 26 Councils; and
- a draft response to the Local Government (Finance) Bill would be submitted to the Committee.

November, 2009

- the development and role-out of the Council's Capacity Building Programme for staff and Elected Members; and
- a draft response to the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill would be produced.

January/February, 2010

- the Voluntary Transition Committees would become Statutory;
- a Members' Severance Scheme would be agreed; and
- the Staff Severance Scheme would be agreed also.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to the implementation of the Transition Plan as outlined.

**Engagement with the
Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee**

The Committee was reminded that, following a request which had been received from the Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee to meet with the Council to discuss concerns in regard to the Review of Public Administration transition process, the Committee, at its meeting on 19th June, had agreed that an All-Party delegation consisting of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Party Group Leaders on the Committee (or their nominees) and the Chief Executive be authorised to meet with the Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee.

The Chief Executive reported that a meeting in this regard had taken place on 25th August. At that meeting, which had been very constructive, there had been a clear consensus around a number of common aims in relation to the Review of Public Administration transition process, including:

- ensuring that the best interests of both the citizen and staff were pursued;
- ensuring that service continuity was maintained or improved;
- seeking to moderate potential impact on the rate resulting from the reform process; and
- ensuring, as far as possible, a seamless Review of Public Administration Transition.

While there had been a recognition that there still remained some uncertainty around the final decision of the Environment Minister and the Northern Ireland Executive in regard to the new local government boundaries, it was agreed that both Transition Committees needed to work in partnership to consider and plan for those areas of mutual concern so as to ensure a successful and smooth transition from the old to the new Councils. It was the consensual view that any initial work would not be nugatory.

General discussions had taken place in relation to some of the key issues which needed to be explored in detail, for example, staffing, convergence, operational/service delivery, aligning financial planning processes, the transfer of assets and liabilities and joint communications. However, it had been agreed that the inaugural meetings should be very much focused on familiarisation among both Transition Committees and the agreement of a process to enable detailed consideration and discussions around the aforementioned issues to take place in the near future.

At the meeting, it had been agreed that:

- (i) a further joint meeting be convened in two months time, that is, late October, at which a schedule of future meetings would be agreed;
- (ii) the venue of the meetings to be rotated around the three Council offices, with the next meeting in October to be held in the City Hall, Belfast;
- (iii) the host Transition Committee would chair the joint meeting; and
- (iv) a joint officer team would be tasked with working-up a detailed agenda for the meeting around the key issues for discussion and preparing relevant supporting reports which would set out potential options and any associated consequences.

There had been recognition of the special circumstances which existed between Lisburn City, Castlereagh Borough and Belfast City Councils in regard to the Review of Public Administration transition/converging process and concerns had been raised in relation to the absence of any clear guidance from the Department of the Environment and the Minister. It had been suggested that consideration should be given to the possible attendance, as necessary, of senior officials of the Department of the Environment at future joint meetings of the Transition Committees so as to enable them to provide first hand experience/knowledge of the issues of concern and areas which required further clarity.

Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee:

- (i) agrees to the continued engagement with the Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee on transition-related matters;
- (ii) reaffirm that the Elected Members on the Belfast Delegation will consist of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Party Group Leaders represented on the Transition Committee (or their nominees);

- (iii) agrees that officers engage with their counterparts in Lisburn/Castlereagh to work-up an agreed agenda and relevant briefing papers for the next joint meeting of the Transition Committees;
- (iv) note that the next joint meeting of the Transition Committee would be taking place in late October in the City Hall, Belfast; and
- (v) note also that a detailed report on the issues for discussion with the Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its meeting on 9th October.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's
Final Recommendations - Names of the
New Local Government Districts

The Chief Executive advised the Members that correspondence had been received from the Minister of the Environment seeking the views of the Transition Committees on the proposed names for the eleven new local government districts before the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's Final Report was considered by the Executive in the Autumn.

The Committee agreed that the Minister be advised that the Council wished to retain its current name, that is, Belfast City Council.

Chairman