

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 11th December, 2009

## MEETING OF Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

- Members present: Councillor Hartley (Chairman);  
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Lavery); and  
Councillors Attwood, Austin, D. Browne, M. Browne,  
W. Browne, Campbell, Convery, D. Dodds, Hendron,  
N. Kelly, C. Maskey, McCann, Newton,  
Rodgers and Rodway.
- Also attended: Councillor Jones.
- In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;  
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;  
Mr. C. Quigley, Director of Legal Services;  
Mrs. J. Thompson, Director of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. L. Steele, Head of Committee and  
Members' Services; and  
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

### **Apology**

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

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of 4th and 20th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December, subject to the omission of the minute of the meeting of 20th November under the heading "Minutes of Memorabilia Working Group" in so far as it related to exhibitions in the City Hall which, at the request of Councillor Hendron, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

### **Memorabilia Working Group - Exhibitions in the City Hall**

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 20th November under the heading "Memorabilia Working Group – Exhibitions in the City Hall" and agreed that the matter be referred back to the Working Group for further consideration.

### **Transition Committee Business**

#### **Review of Public Administration Update**

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that discussions were ongoing within the Northern Ireland Executive with regard to the progressing of the Review of Public Administration process and the associated reform of Local Government. He advised that the Environment Minister, Mr. Edwin Poots, MLA, was in negotiation with

Ministerial colleagues within the Executive regarding proposed modifications to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's recommendations for the new Belfast City Council Boundary. He pointed out that if there were no political agreement secured around these critical issues within the coming weeks, then the already tight legislative timetable would be unachievable and the local reform programme could be at significant risk.

The Chief Executive reported that, notwithstanding that a final decision had yet to be taken on the boundaries, discussions were ongoing between Council officers and their counterparts in Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough Councils to scope out the transition-related issues which needed to be addressed and moved forward and to collate the relevant baseline information necessary to inform future political discussions. An initial joint project plan had been agreed previously between the three Councils. However, officials from Lisburn and Castlereagh had requested, given the added complexity which they faced in relation to engagement with each other as well as with Belfast, that the timetable for the initial outputs, that is, baseline reports on assets and liabilities and service harmonisation issues, be extended by a month from January to February, 2010.

The Chief Executive reported further that during recent weeks there had been an upsurge in the number of stakeholders from across the City who had approached the Council to seek initial views with regard to community planning. As agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 20th November, a series of briefing sessions were to be scheduled during December, 2009 and January, 2010 with the Party Groupings in order to seek Members' views on how the Council should move forward the issue of community planning and to agree the key principles and process for supporting this.

Noted.

### Democratic Services and Governance

#### 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:

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	Meet the Buyer Workshop Dinner 21 <sup>st</sup> April, 2010 Approximately 260 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	Delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the workshop will take place within the city. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,040

<b>Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Queen's University Belfast	'Geographies of Orthodoxy' International Conference Dinner 10 <sup>th</sup> June, 2010 Approximately 60 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	Delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city. 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 red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £240
Queen's University Belfast	17 <sup>th</sup> Australasian Irish Studies Conference Reception 4 <sup>th</sup> July, 2010 Approximately 100 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	Delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city. 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 red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £400
British Psychological Society Division	Conference Reception 15 <sup>th</sup> September, 2010 Approximately 250 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	Delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better Support for People and Communities'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,000

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Belfast Media Group	Belfast's Top 40 under 40 4 <sup>th</sup> March, 2010 Approximately 150 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits.	This event seeks to acknowledge the achievements of the emerging leaders of Belfast. by recognising the top 40 individuals from across the City who are under the age of 40. The event will actively promote the achievements of people working in a range of fields and aims to recognise excellence and best practice, encourage potential and promote the message that no challenge is too great. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together, 'Better opportunities for success across the city' and 'Better Support for People and Communities'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits . Approximate cost £300
Youth Link	Youth Link Presentation Ceremony 23 <sup>rd</sup> June, 2010 Approximately 600 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and sandwiches	Youth Link is an inter-church youth service which aims to provide support and training for youth workers whilst improving community relations experiences for young people. The Awards Ceremony seeks to recognise the achievements of those who have completed programmes such as the 'Leadership in youth work programme' and the 'Inter-Cultural learning programme', which are organised by Youth Link. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together', 'Better Support for People and Communities' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and sandwiches Approximate cost £2,100

<b>Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
The Masters in Business Administration (MBA) Association - Belfast Chapter	The 2010 MBA Awards Ceremony 29 <sup>th</sup> May, 2010 Approximately 350 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	The Association aims to promote excellence in Business Administration and to acknowledge the significant contribution made by individual graduates, lecturers, academic institutions and supporting organisations to the success of the private and public sector and non-profit-making organisations in Belfast and beyond. The event also aims to promote the benefits of staff development and the professional standing of the Masters in Business Administration qualification. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,400
The Abbeyfield Belfast Society Ltd	50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 8 <sup>th</sup> September, 2010 Approximately 200 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits.	This event seeks to celebrate the 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Abbeyfield Belfast Society and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'Better Support for People and Communities', 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better Services – listening and delivering'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits . Approximate cost £400

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Millar Memorial Flute Band	100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner 19 <sup>th</sup> November, 2011 Approximately 180 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre- dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Millar Memorial Flute Band and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well- being of the city. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'Better Support for People and Communities'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of red/white wine and soft drinks. Approximate cost £720
Belfast City Council Parks and Leisure Department	City of Belfast International Rose Trials Dinner 14 <sup>th</sup> July, 2010 Approximately 200 Attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality in the form of a Civic Dinner	The City of Belfast International Rose Trials will be held during Rose Week. The Trials are renowned worldwide for attracting international rose growers in addition to a significant number of visitors. 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 a Civic Dinner Approximate cost £7,000

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

### **Northern Ireland Local Government Association – Annual Conference**

The Committee was advised that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association was holding its Annual Conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle on Thursday, 18th and Friday, 19th February, 2010. The theme of the Conference was "Delivering Change – A Local Government for Tomorrow", with the main focus on the progress achieved in implementing the reform of Local Government and the major hurdles which remained to be overcome in order to ensure that the 2011 deadline was met. Attendance at the Conference would provide an opportunity for Councillors to network with other Elected Members and consider how the vision for a modern Local Government system could be achieved within the designated timeframe. In addition, Members would be able to participate in the Northern Ireland Local Government Awards Ceremony, which aimed to recognise exceptional performance and achievement by both officers and Members, which would be held on the Thursday evening.

The Committee authorised the attendance at the Northern Ireland Local Government Association Annual Conference of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Head of Committee and Members' Services (or their nominees), as well as the Council's representatives on the Association.

**Developing Elected Members 2010  
Conference and Workshop**

The Committee was advised that the Local Government Chronicle, supported by the IDeA, was organising an Elected Member Development Conference and Workshop on 26th and 27th January. The Conference, which would be held in the America Square Conference Centre, London, would focus on how Members could best be supported and developed, particularly as their roles and responsibilities evolved.

The benefits to be gained from Members' attendance at the event included:

- a better understanding of the importance of Member development in the context of community leadership;
- learning from best practice in a wide range of Local Authorities;
- accessing networking opportunities with Member peers from across England, Scotland and Wales; and
- learning what Members felt they needed from Induction Training.

The Conference would be addressed by a number of expert speakers who had specialised knowledge of Member development issues and would examine specifically the area of Member Induction Training. It would involve case studies, discussion sessions and small group work.

The Committee authorised the attendance at the Elected Member Development Conference and Workshop 2010 of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman and the Head of Committee and Members' Services (or their nominees), together with a Member from each of the Party Groupings not represented by the aforementioned Members.

**Transitional Governance Arrangements  
for the Education Sector**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“Purpose of Report**

**To determine a response to correspondence received from the Minister for Education regarding the transitional governance arrangements for the education sector.**

**Background**

**Correspondence has been received from the Minister for Education explaining that the Education Bill provides for the replacement of the five Education and Library Boards with a new Education and Skills Authority. However, the legislation has not yet been passed by the Assembly and accordingly the commencement date of 1st January 2010 which had been agreed by the Executive for the establishment of the new body is not achievable and interim governance and management arrangements will have to be put in place.**

The Minister has decided to reduce the size of the Education and Library Boards and under the transitional arrangements the Council has been allocated four places on the Belfast Board.

However, in order to comply with the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, which states that at least two nominees should be sought for each vacancy, the Minister has invited the Council to put forward at least eight Councillors who would be willing to sit on the Board during the transitional period. Each Councillor would be required to complete an application form detailing how he or she would meet the key requirements for appointment to the posts. The application forms would be subject to eligibility sift followed by 'conversations with a purpose' with candidates to confirm and validate suitability. The final decision on appointment would be made by the Minister with a view to achieving a balance in terms of diversity of skills and experience. All appointments made would be for the transitional period prior to the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority.

The Minister is seeking a response from the Council by 16th December.

#### Key Issues

The Council currently has 14 representatives on the Belfast Education and Library Board. These are:

#### Sinn Féin

Councillor Breige Brownlee  
Councillor Tiarna Cunningham  
Councillor Tom Hartley  
Councillor Danny Lavery

#### DUP

Councillor Diane Dodds  
Councillor Nelson McCausland  
Councillor David Rodway

#### UUP

Councillor David Browne  
Councillor Jim Rodgers  
Councillor Bob Stoker



**SDLP**

Councillor Tim Attwood  
Councillor Patrick Convery  
Councillor Cathal Mullaghan

**All**

Councillor Máire Hendron

These Party Group appointments were determined using the Council's d'Hondt process immediately following the Local Government Elections in May, 2005 and were approved by the Council at its Annual meeting on 1st June, 2005 for the period to end on the date of the Local Government Elections, then anticipated to be held in May, 2009, though obviously, for a variety of reasons, the names of the Council's representatives have changed from time to time. The Committee, in January of this year, agreed that, as a consequence of the extension of the existing Council term, all appointments to outside Bodies should be extended to the date of the next Local Government Elections in May, 2011.

The original d'Hondt process involved appointments being made to a wide range of organisations and involved more than 90 selections being made by the Group Leaders. Obviously, choices are influenced by various factors and those organisations which are considered by the Party Group Leaders to be most important in terms of the life of the City are foremost in the order of selection. Education obviously took high rank in the original process and membership of the Belfast Board is highly valued among the Members.

At its meeting on 19th August, 2005 the Committee agreed to continue the application of the original d'Hondt process for the filling of appointments which became necessary throughout the life of the Council and this has been applied successfully. However, the current proposal is to reduce the existing 14 representatives of the Council to 4, and there would appear to be two options.

Firstly, to determine the Council's representatives using a one-off selection process based on d'Hondt. The current strength of the Party Groupings would result in the undernoted choice sequence:

SF	choices	1, 5 and 7
DUP	choices	2, 6 and 8
UUP	choice	3
SDLP	choice	4

It is important to note that the first four choices fall to the largest Party Groupings and if the Council were being asked to nominate only sufficient Members to fill the number of places which the legislation stipulates must be allocated to the Local Authority then the representatives of those Groupings would be the Council's nominees.

Secondly, to take the view that the Council has already nominated its representatives on the Belfast Education and Library Board using the d'Hondt process and if the Minister wishes to reduce this figure from 14 to 4 then she should make her selections from that pool of Councillors. In putting this forward as an option, though, the Minister should be reminded that, in the interests of fairness, equality and justice, the 4 places on the new Body should be filled by representatives of the 4 largest Party Groupings on the Council.

It should be noted that, because of the deadlines set by the Minister, any decision made by the Committee would have to be conveyed to her prior to ratification by the Council and it will also be necessary for the Party Groupings to name their representatives at this stage.

#### Recommendation

To consider the options put forward and to take such action thereon as may be determined.

Officers to contact: Mr. Liam Steele,  
Head of Committee and Members' Services

#### Decision Tracking

The Committee's decision will be conveyed to the Minister prior to the deadline date of 16th December."

#### Proposal

Moved by Councillor Rodway,  
Seconded by Councillor Campbell,

That the Committee agrees, in light of the extremely short timeframe imposed by the Minister and her apparent disregard for Local Government processes, to defer consideration of the question of the nomination of Members to the transitional Belfast Education and Library Board.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Rodgers,  
Seconded by Councillor Lavery,

That the Committee agrees to nominate only four Members to the Belfast Education and Library Board and that, based on the use of a one-off d'Hondt selection process, these comprise one Member from each of the four main Party Groupings on the Council, that is, the Sinn Fein, the Democratic Unionist, the Ulster Unionist and the SDLP Party Groupings.

On a vote by show of hands ten Members voted for the amendment and three against and it was accordingly declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put as the substantive motion, when ten Members voted for and four against and it was accordingly declared carried.

The Committee noted that the Head of Committee and Members' Services would contact each of the four Party Group Leaders in order to determine the names of their nominees to the Board so that these could be conveyed to the Minister before the deadline set of 16th December.

**Finance**

**Budget Monitoring Report**

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

**"Relevant Background Information**

**The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has requested that it receive regular updates on budgetary performance throughout the year and the most recent report on the 2009/10 position was presented on 23 October 2009. This report updates Members on the current year's position at period 7, the forecast outturn for the financial year and highlights budget risk areas.**

**Key Issues**

**Revenue Budget Position to October 2009**

**BCC has a net departmental budget of £70.2m for the period to October. The outturn for the year to date is £67.9m giving an under-spend of £2.3m. The reasons for this under-spend are explained below.**

### Forecast Revenue Outturn 2009/10

The forecast outturn for 2009/10 is an under-spend of £3.9m. There have been several factors which have contributed to this forecast:

1. Increased rate income has been forecast by Land and Property Services of some £834k - this is an area which Belfast City Council officers have been focusing on in recent years, particularly in relation to vacant properties.
2. The pay rise for 2009/10 was settled at a lower amount than previously budgeted (original budget was for 2.5% compared to base settlement of 1%).
3. There have been a number of adjustments within Departmental Budgets to reflect the up to date financial position.
4. A comprehensive review of capital financing has been carried out in preparation for the 2010/11 rates setting process.

This forecast includes the voluntary redundancy exercise for ISB (which has a net impact of some £700k in 2009/10 after in year savings) but excludes the remainder of the potential voluntary redundancy costs which are the subject of a separate SP&R report and are discussed further below.

### Budgetary Risks / Pressures

The register of all the budget risk areas, their financial implications and the action required to manage the risks is updated monthly.

A number of the key risks that have been included in the overall financial forecast above and are putting pressure on the current year's budget are:

1. If the current low level in interest rates prevail to the end of the year, this is likely to cause a £460,000 loss of income in terms of interest on Council reserves.
2. Building Control show a loss of income due to the downturn in the housing market. This has resulted in a loss of external income of £234,670 for the year to date.
3. ISB has experienced a loss of external income of £145,500 at Period 7.

### Impact on Reserves

As reported at the SP&R Committee of 20 November, the planned reserves at the end of 2009/10 were some £2.7m (after planned contributions from reserves to the 2009/10 rate of £2.4m). If the forecast under-spend of £3.9m above is achieved, this would lead to reserves at 31 March 2010 of £6.6m.

However, a paper on the voluntary redundancy exercise is being separately presented to the SP&R Committee today. If Members agree to implement this VR exercise, then the inclusion of the £2.3m of estimated costs in 2009/10 would reduce the year end reserves to some £4.3m. Given the ongoing savings generated by VR, this is viewed as acceptable at this stage.

We will continue to refine the 2009/10 financial position and regularly update Members. However, the Council's reserves will need to be replenished which will have an impact on the setting of the District Rate for 2010/11 and future years. This is discussed within the separate paper on the Financial Estimates for 2010/11 presented to the SP&R Committee today.

### Capital Programme 2009/10

The draft Capital Programme for 2009/10 and future years outlines a programme of expenditure of £10.2m for 2009/10 to be financed by loans plus £2.1m to be financed by revenue contributions, giving a total budgeted expenditure for the year of £12.3m.

Expenditure for the period to October amounts to £11m. The most significant areas of expenditure are Ulster Hall Major Works of £1.6m and City Hall Major Works of £2.8m.

### Forecast Capital Outturn 2009/10

The forecast capital financing requirement for the year can be met by the existing budget. The total actual capital expenditure for 2009/10 is forecast to be some £18.5m. This is £6.2m over the approved budget and relates mainly to an under-spend in 2008/09 of £5.1m which has rolled forward to 2009/10. There have also been a number of new schemes added to the capital programme since the original capital programme was planned. Due to the timing of taking out of loans, this additional expenditure can be financed within the capital financing budget.

### Resource Implications

As outlined above.

**Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the current revenue and capital financial positions to date and the forecast outturns. In addition, Members are asked to note the implications for reserves and the potential to fund the costs from the voluntary redundancy exercise, should this be agreed through the separate SP&R report presented today.

**Decision Tracking**

Regular updates on the financial position in 2009/10 will continue to be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

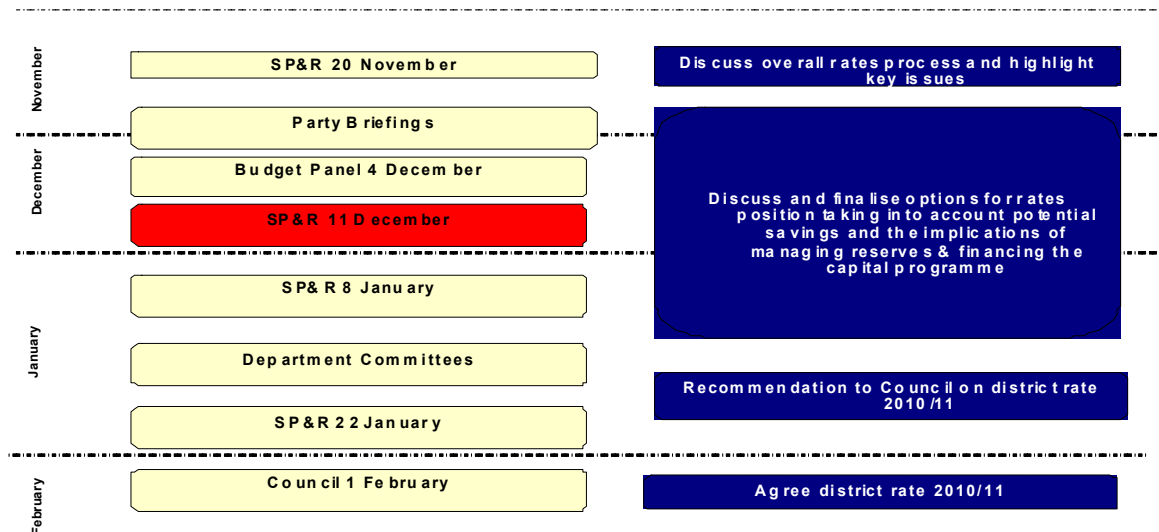
**Update on Financial Estimates and District Rate 2010/2011**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“Relevant Background Information and Purpose of Report**

Members will recall that, at the last meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the following process was agreed for setting the district rate and agreeing the estimates for 2010/11.

**Timetable for Rate Setting Process 2010-2011**



The purpose of this report is to:

- update Members on progress; and
- discuss a number of options for further consideration.

## Key Issues

### 1. Objectives

It is proposed that the overall strategy for setting the district rate for 2010/11 should be to achieve the following objectives:

- To agree a district rate which is acceptable to Members
- Strengthen the Council's financial position, most notably the district reserves
- Establish cash limits for department estimates and deliver efficiency savings
- Provide affordable and sustainable financial arrangements to deliver Members' capital programme and City Investment Strategy aspirations.

In this context, Members will need to consider the following before finalising the district rate and estimates for 2010/11:

- The reserves position of the Council
- How the capital programme and City Investment Strategy will be financed
- Department estimates and efficiency savings
- Thematic Budget
- The EPP position

### 2. Summary of Current Position for 2010/11

The table below summarises the current position in terms of the key factors which will influence the rate setting decision for 2010/11. As can be seen from the table, the current overall impact on the district rate is a 7.81% increase which equates to a 3.28% increase to the ratepayer. For the average capital domestic value this will mean a £24.38 increase in the ratepayer's annual rate bill. Of the 7.81% increase on the rate, some 5.73% relates to investment in the capital programme or in reserves and just over 2% of the increase relates to Departmental Estimates.

### Current Estimated Rate Increase 2010/11

	2010/11 Increase	% Rate Increase
Departmental Estimates	2,912,649	2.17%
CIF	1,000,000	0.75%
Revenue Contributions to capital	955,180	0.71%
Capital Financing	812,060	0.61%
General Exchequer Grant	(125,960)	(0.09)
<b>Rate Increase before Reserves</b>		<b>4.15%</b>
Movement in Reserves	4,900,000	3.66%
<b>District Rate Increase</b>	<b>10,453,929</b>	<b>7.81%</b>
Average impact on rate payer	24.38	

Each main element of the table is discussed in more detail below.

#### (a) Department Estimates

This is money required by departments to deliver services and typically covers expenditure on headings such as salaries, supplies and services. All departments have prepared estimates for 2010/11. As a consequence net expenditure is budgeted to rise by £2.9m which equates to a 2.17% increase on the rate. This has been mainly driven by increased utility costs (£786k), superannuation contributions (£700k) and landfill tax (£542k) along with the loss of external income (£1.3m). Despite these uncontrollable cost increases, the proposed departmental increase is the lowest for some time and this has been achieved by reducing costs in areas such as consultancy, use of external facilities and office equipment. Details of department's estimates will be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in January prior to submission to the individual Departmental Committees.

The department increase of 2.17% compares to the latest government inflation figure of 1.5%. However, this figure reflects prices at October 2009 and does not include a forecast element for 2010/11. The HM Treasury, "Forecast for the UK economy" forecasts that inflation by 2011 will be in the range of 1.6% to 2.7%.



**(b) City Investment Strategy**

**This was developed by the Council to help deliver Members' aspirations by supporting major iconic projects in the city and to act as a mechanism for the Council to help lever additional money into the city.**

**To date, the Council has committed funding to four key iconic projects across the city:**

- (i) Titanic Signature Project - £10m committed**
- (ii) The Mac - £550,000 committed**
- (iii) The Lyric - £1.25m committed**
- (iv) The Connswater Community Greenway - £4.2m committed.**

**Together these 4 projects have levered in over £153million of investment in the city. The committed cost for the Council (up to 2013) for these four projects is £16m of which nearly £4.5m has so far been raised by 1 April 2009. In December 2007, it was agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the City Investment Strategy would be funded through the investment of £1m, £2m and £3m over a three year period. 2010/11 is the third year of this arrangement and therefore an additional £1m of funding to cover the city investment strategy will be required.**

**(c) Capital Programme**

**Up to this year the council has been able to pay for its capital expenditure through revenue contributions and use of internal cash. In basic terms this means the council was able to pay for capital schemes with its own money rather than having to borrow. The financial position of the organisation, as previously has been reported, has now changed. This means that the organisation must borrow up to £58m to finance current committed schemes in the capital programme. All the money does not need to be borrowed at one time but it does mean there will have to be a stepped increase in the rate over the next four years in order to meet this financial commitment. For 2010/11, capital financing will need to be increased by £1.77m which is the equivalent of a 1.32% increase in the rate.**

**(d) Reserves**

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 20 November 2009, Members were informed that the forecast for reserves at the end of 2009/10 was £2.7m. Since this meeting a detailed review of the balances has been carried out and the revised year end forecast for reserves is now £4.3m. Members should note that this closing position also allows for £2.3m of voluntary redundancies to be financed during 2009/10, should this be agreed. (Both the voluntary redundancy exercise and the 2009/10 financial position are discussed in more detail in separate reports which are also being discussed by committee today.)

There is therefore a need to build reserves up to a more acceptable level for an organisation of this size. This needs to be set in the context of future external financial pressures such as RPA and the implications of the regional rate for 2011/12. In addition, the implementation of the Local Government Finance Bill could mean a more prescriptive approach to the level of reserves and therefore BCC needs to have a sound reserves position as it moves forward.

Best practice guidance from CIPFA and advice from the local government auditor would indicate that reserves should be in the range of £8m to £10m. We would therefore recommend to Members that, as a minimum, a contribution should be made to reserves from the rate over the next three years as follows:

2010/11	£2.5m
2011/12	£1.5m
2012/13	£1.0m

**(e) Thematic Budget**

This budget heading was first established by Members in 2009/10 in recognition that the cross-cutting work which the Council is trying to encourage could not be solely delivered within functional budgets. It was agreed that the budget of £500,000 should be used to kick start projects and build the infrastructure required to deliver thematic working. In June 2009 the Strategic Policy Resources Committee agreed to allocate the budget to as follows:

- Older People £87,000
- Health & Well Being £100,000
- SaferCity £145,000
- Better Care for the Environment £57,000
- Children and Young People £100,000.

**Examples of how the budget has been used in 2009/10 include:**

- **Fuel Stamp Scheme**
- **Good Morning Project**
- **Older Peoples Convention**
- **Community Safety Warden posts**
- **Development of Safer City Plan**
- **Joint funding with Public Health Agency and Health and Social Services Trust for Health and Well Being posts**
- **Alcohol and obesity projects**
- **Neighbourhood Programme for young people**
- **City Centre Programme for young people**
- **Biodiversity DVD**
- **Waste Categorisation Survey**

**Members will need to decide on the size of this budget for 2010/11 and how it will be allocated. Proposals will be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 8 January 2010 as to how the budget could be allocated in 2010/11. £500k has already been factored into the rates position described above for thematic budgets.**

- (f) Estimate Penny Product (EPP) – this provides an estimate of what the rates will yield in income for the Council for 2010/11. As the Council is dependent on the district rate for 74% of its income it is essential that as accurate as possible EPP is provided by Land and Property Services (LPS). A first draft EPP has been received from LPS and this shows a 1.2% increase from last year. This is better than expected given the current economic climate and it would appear that the work Council officers are doing in conjunction with LPS to try to maximise the collectable rate is starting to bear fruit.**

#### **Summary of the Current Position**

**To summarise, the current position is that a 7.81% increase in the rate will allow Members to:**

- **Meet the cost requirements of delivering planned services to the population of Belfast;**
- **Improve the reserves position by £2.5m;**
- **Deliver the rate financing requirements of the city investment strategy and the current capital programme.**

### 3. Options for Savings

The outstanding issue which requires discussion is efficiency savings. The voluntary redundancy exercise, if agreed by Members will generate £1m of savings in 2010/11. These are not included in the 7.81% rate increase described above.

In addition, the organisation has been working hard on a number of efficiency projects, such as the review of the centre, better procurement, improved use of technology and the mini budget review. These projects have not been fully developed but it is estimated that savings in the region of £1m could be generated. Again, these potential savings do not form part of the 7.81% rate increase. It is proposed that Members ask officers to bring a report back to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 8 January identifying, in further detail, the areas where £1m of savings could be achieved in 2010/11 and the implications of the savings proposals. This report will have to contain measures which can be achieved in a short timeframe with minimal additional costs. At the next meeting, Members will be requested to approve the efficiency programme and by doing so it means that the £1m savings can be factored into the 2010/11 estimates process.

If the potential savings for 2010/11 (£2m) were applied to the rate, then the rate increase of 7.81% would fall to 5.52%. The rates position, however, is different from other years because a significant proportion of the rates increase for 2010/11 must be used for replenishing reserves and financing current capital expenditure. This means that there is little headroom for Members to do new things such as expanding the current capital programme. Members may therefore wish to consider alternative uses for the potential £2m efficiency savings. For example:

- applying £1m of the savings to finance additional capital borrowing would result in a further £10m being available to apply to new capital schemes;
- given the uncertainty over RPA financing Members could decide to accelerate the replenishment of reserves by applying a proportion of the savings to this area.

If new investment is agreed to be put into new capital borrowing, the Director of Property and Projects will then work with Members to agree the prioritisation of the schemes to be funded from such investment.

4. Implications for the Overall Rate Position

The tables overleaf summarise the potential rate options discussed above and their impact on the ratepayer.

Summary of Potential Rate Increases

	District Increase	Rate	Total Increase	Rate	Impact on Ratepayer
<b>Current Position</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional capital finance outside current programme</li> <li>• £2.5m investment in reserves</li> <li>• No VR / other savings</li> </ul>	7.81%		3.28%		£24.38
<b>Current Position plus £2m efficiency savings applied to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional capital finance for new programme</li> <li>• Additional Reserves</li> </ul>	7.81%		3.28%		£24.38
<b>Current Position minus £2m efficiency savings applied to the rate but:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional capital finance outside current programme</li> <li>• £2.5m investment in reserves</li> </ul>	5.52%		2.32%		£17.25

## Implications for Ratepayers

PROPERTY	Ave Capital Value	Increase in Rate Bill		
	/NAV	5.52%		7.81%
<b>Domestic Properties</b>				
	£	£		£
Terrace House	86,425	12.96		18.32
3-Bed Semi-Detached House	132,173	19.83		28.02
4-Bed Detached House	293,843	44.07		62.29
Apartment	83,379	12.51		17.68
Average Capital Value	115,000	17.25		24.38
<b>Non-Domestic Properties</b>				
Office Property	12,728	166.74		235.47
Retail Property	10,247	134.24		189.57

### 5. Key Questions

Members will need to address the following questions:

- (a) Do they agree that a further £1m should be invested in the City Investment Strategy?;
- (b) Do they agree that a minimum of £2.5m should be set aside as a contribution from the rates to reserves?;
- (c) Should further work be done by officers to develop an efficiency programme to meet a target of £1m and a report brought back to the next P&R meeting?; and
- (d) Should the VR exercise efficiencies and efficiency programme savings (£2m in total), if agreed, be used to reduce the 2010/11 rate or be invested in the capital programme or reserves?

### Recommendations

Members are requested to:

1. Note the contents of the report;
2. Consider whether they wish to finalise the answers to each of the key questions in section 5 above; and
3. Agree to receive a report at the 8 January 2010 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the allocation of the thematic budget 2010/11, the council's efficiency programme, the breakdown of the Departmental Estimates and the overall rate position."

After a lengthy discussion in the matter, it was agreed that

- (i) a further £1 million should be invested in the City Investment Strategy;
- (ii) a minimum of £2.5 million should be set aside as a contribution from the rates to reserves;
- (iii) further work be undertaken by officers in order to develop an efficiency programme to meet a target of £1 million and that a report thereon be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- (iv) should the Voluntary Redundancy exercise, which would be considered later in the meeting, be agreed, which, when added to the efficiency programme savings would yield a total of £2 million, then the funds be invested in the Council's reserves, with the potential for a proportion to be accessed to fund new capital commitments, should they be agreed and approved, up to a maximum of £1 million.

#### **Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel of 4th December.

#### **Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Panel**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel of 25th November.

#### **Human Resources**

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

#### **Appointment of Director of Property and Projects**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 23rd October, it had agreed that, in the interest of making an early appointment to the post of Director of Property and Projects, authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the selection panel, to offer the post to the recommended candidate with the outcome of the process being reported back to the Committee for noting. The Chief Executive advised the Members that the post had been trawled within the Council on 26th October for two weeks, with a closing date of 6th November. Two applications had been received and, following short-listing, both applicants had been invited to attend an assessment centre, after which one candidate had been invited to attend for final interview. As a result of the final interview, the selection panel had recommended unanimously the appointment of Mr. Gerry Millar on the appropriate point of the salary band for Chief Officers.

Noted.

### Rightsizing Exercise

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### “Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that in preparation for the 2010/11 budget setting process, Members authorised the carrying out of a mini budget review to:

- Identify the likely year end (2009/10) financial position; and
- Identify options for political consideration for reducing expenditure.

In this context, Members further authorised a trawl for voluntary redundancy directed towards the identification of efficiency savings taking into account the significant downturn in certain areas of business caused by the recession, ongoing structural reviews within departments and the review of central support units.

The Committee was advised in November, 2009 that 64 formal applications had been received for VR and that these were being evaluated against the criteria/principles previously agreed by Committee.

It was agreed that a further report would be brought back in December, in the context of the rate setting process, setting out the cost of the VR exercise; options for how it might be funded and the savings that such an exercise would realise.

These issues are addressed below.

#### Key Issues

1. In the first instance the 64 applications were individually assessed against a payback period of 3.25 years, this being a best practice payback period.
2. Of the 64 applications, 9 employees do not meet the 3.25 payback period and will therefore be declined, leaving 55 applications for evaluation by departments as to whether or not the posts in which these staff are employed may be declared redundant.
3. Following assessment of these 55 applications against the agreed criteria and principles, departments have indicated that there is potential for 25 employees to be released on the grounds of VR. Further work continues to be undertaken on the remaining 30 applications to establish whether or not these posts could represent a saving through, for example, a transferred redundancy to manage a supernumerary employee.



- 4. The one off cost to the Council of releasing the 25 staff would be some £2.3 million. It is estimated that this initial investment will lead to staff savings of some £1 million each and every year (i.e. leading to £5m after 5 years), after making the structural changes needed to facilitate the release of some staff.**
- 5. If Members agree that this exercise should proceed, the estimated costs of implementing the VR exercise can be accommodated within the financial position for 2009/10, as set out in today's report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the Financial Position for 2009/10.**
- 6. If the savings are to be secured for the 2010/11 rate setting process, then the staff will need to be released by 1 April 2010 (with most needing a three month notice period).**
- 7. In order to achieve this, we would need to move quickly to review the organisation structures in relation to each of the relevant areas and therefore ensure that all the financial and HR implications of releasing the staff are fully identified. This work has already been completed for Building Control. Members can be assured there will be full consultation on the Committee and Members' Services review, as this impinges on their support arrangements and the corporate governance process.**
- 8. Members will therefore need to address the following questions:**
  - 8.1 Do they wish to release the 25 staff at a cost of £2.3M with a payback of 2.3 years and a saving over 5 years of £5m?**
  - 8.2 If the release is authorised, in order for the savings to be captured for the 2010/11 financial year the redundancies will need to be approved so that most of them can take effect by the end of April 2010.**
  - 8.3 In these circumstances authority is sought to conduct the structural reviews identified at Appendix 1, so that consideration can take place with the Trade Unions, the precise costs can be identified and staff who have volunteered for redundancy can be released in accordance with the provision made for them in the estimates.**

8.4 To ensure that these reviews deliver the efficiency savings identified, it is recommended that the Committee direct that the reviews be conducted in a manner that achieves the following targets:

- Net saving of £1M to be achieved in 2010/11;
- Total cost to be no more than £2.3M with a payback period of no more than 2.3 years;
- Supernumerary staff to be managed in a time bound manner and resolved by the end of the financial year. ;
- Reviews will be conducted and implemented in accordance with BCC HR policies and procedures;
- Trade Unions will be fully consulted and agreement sought in relation to all releases and structural changes;
- Regular reports will be made to Committee on the progress of this exercise with final structures being reported to Committee for notation; and
- Delegated authority being given to the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Budget and Transformation Panel, to release staff on voluntary redundancy subject to the principles set out above and the agreement of final staff structures in the areas set out in the Appendix which has been circulated which achieves the necessary savings.

9. The situation with supernumerary staff is currently being managed in line with the Committee's decision. However the costs and savings will not be known until these staff are either redeployed into vacant posts or made redundant. There is therefore a need to resolve this matter in time to impact on the Council costs for 2010/11.

#### Resource Implications

Financial - as outlined above:

HR – within existing provision; Other assets – n/a

#### Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that Committee:

1. Agree to the voluntary redundancy exercise being implemented subject to the targets and principles set out in paragraph 8

2. Agree to the implementation of the completed Building Control review, given the costs and savings which have already been identified as set out in Appendix two
3. Agree the undertaking of detailed structural reviews in the areas set out
4. Agree that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Budget and Transformation Panel, to release staff on VR subject to the principles set out in paragraph 8 and the agreement to final staff structures in the areas set out which achieve the necessary savings.

It is also recommended that the work that is currently taking place with supernumerary staff, officers and trade unions is progressed as a matter of urgency to ensure that actions taken to resolve this matter are implemented by 1 April 2010.

#### **Decision Tracking**

Regular reports will be made to committee on the progress of this exercise with final structures being reported to committee for notation.

#### **Key to Abbreviations**

VR- voluntary redundancy.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

#### **Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives**

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Order 55 and the authority delegated to her, the Director of Finance and Resources had authorised the appointment of a number of members of staff who were related to existing officers of the Council.

#### **Asset Management**

##### **Disposal of Beechmount Leisure Centre Site**

In accordance with Standing Order 60, the Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 10th December, had agreed to the disposal to the Trustees of Coláiste Feirste of approximately 9.567 acres of the Beechmount Leisure Centre site in return for the sum of £2.325 million, subject to the completion of an appropriate agreement to be prepared by the Director of Legal Services.

### **Connswater Community Greenway**

The Committee was reminded that the Council, as part of the City Investment Strategy, had agreed to co-ordinate the acquisition of land to enable the Connswater Community Greenway programme to proceed. The Council would secure rights over the land needed for the Greenway and would be responsible for the management and maintenance of that land and any assets on it. The Greenway would have to be accessible for forty years to comply with the Big Lottery Fund letter of offer, although the intention was to secure rights for longer if possible.

It was reported that two areas of land had been identified as being required to help complete the Greenway route and associated landscaping. The first was an area of 0.67 acres of land located off Ladas Drive and Council officers had agreed, subject to the Committee's approval, to purchase from the Northern Ireland Policing Board a 99-year lease for £10,000 and subject to a peppercorn rent. The second was an area of 32.5 square metres of land on either side of the Connswater River, adjacent to the Airport Road. Subject to Committee approval, Council officers had agreed to purchase from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners a 99-year lease on the land, with an annual rent of 5 pence, if demanded.

The Committee granted approval for the purchase of the two areas of land as outlined.

### **Good Relations and Equality**

(Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager, attended in connection with these items.)

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

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership of 4th December, including:

#### **Minority Integration**

Approval to invite tenders for a suitable organisation to develop and deliver a training programme to support the integration of new communities in Belfast at a cost of approximately £29,500.

#### **St. Patrick's Day 2010 – Small Grants Scheme**

The award of up to £1,000 to those groups which met the criteria for funding under the St. Patrick's Day Small Grants Scheme.

### **Minutes of Memorabilia Working Group**

#### **Plaques in the City Hall**

In considering the minutes of the meeting of the Memorabilia Working Group of 3rd December, a Member expressed concern that the various plaques which had been located on the East Staircase of the City Hall had again been removed despite the Council having decided that they be replaced on a temporary basis until the Working Group had given consideration to their location on a permanent basis.

In response, the Chairman of the Working Group (Councillor Hendron) advised the Committee that, prior to the removal, she had consulted with Council officers and agreed that they be removed since their location had been agreed only as a temporary measure. She explained that it had been her understanding, given the debate which had taken place at the Committee's meeting on 23rd October, that the Members had wanted the plaques to be displayed only during the month of November whilst the various commemorative wreath-laying services took place during that period. She pointed out that research had commenced regarding the various plaques which had been donated to the Council over the years and it was anticipated that a report would be submitted to the Memorabilia Working Group at an early date outlining which plaques should be replaced. At that stage the Group would then determine the permanent location for the siting of the plaques.

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

That the various plaques which had been located previously on the East Staircase of the City Hall be replaced until the process in relation to which plaques would be reinstated had been completed.

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

#### **Further Proposal**

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

That the exercise in relation to the plaques to be reinstated in the City Hall be completed and a report thereon be submitted to the Committee before the end of January, 2010.

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

#### **Somme Resolution**

The Committee agreed that the question of revised wording for the Somme Resolution for use from 1st July, 2010 onwards be deferred to enable an opinion to be sought from the Somme Association and a report thereon to be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

#### **Adoption of Minutes**

Subject to the foregoing omission in relation to the Somme Resolution, the minutes of the meeting of the Memorabilia Working Group of 3rd December were approved and adopted.

#### **Cross-Cutting Issues**

### **Assault in the City Hall Grounds**

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

The Committee noted the contents of a report in relation to an assault on Mr. Jim McDowell, Northern Editor of the Sunday World newspaper, which had taken place in the grounds of the City Hall on 25th November. The Committee noted also that two persons had been arrested in relation to the assault but had been released on police bail.

### **City Centre Policing**

Arising out of discussion in the aforementioned item, the Committee agreed that a report in relation to policing in the City centre be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

### **New Regional Hospital for Women and Children Working Group**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

**Members of the working group will recall that the Council, at its meeting on 1st July, 2009, passed unanimously the following Notice of Motion:**

**‘Belfast City Council calls on the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Northern Ireland Executive to make the completion of the new regional hospital for children and women, on the site of the Royal Group of Hospitals, a matter of top priority in the next comprehensive spending review.**

**The Council calls on the Minister of Health and the Executive to secure the resources now for clearing the site, which is an essential first step in progressing the new hospital for children and women. The Council agrees to work in partnership with the Royal Maternity Hospital Liaison Group to lobby the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to secure the capital funds necessary to build the new regional hospital for children and women.’**

**A series of discussion followed leading up to a meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 12th December, 2008, at which the following was agreed, and ratified at the full council meeting in January 2009:**

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

**On 19th May the Members of the Working Group undertook a visit to the Royal Maternity Hospital and received a presentation from representatives of the Belfast Trust which had been attended also by Maternity staff and a representative of the Royal Jubilee Maternity Liaison Committee. In addition, the Chairman (Councillor Attwood) and other Member of the Working Group had, on 24th August met with the Health Minister, Mr. Michael McGimpsey, in order to outline the Council's support for the provision of a new regional hospital. The Minister had indicated that, due to funding constraints, the Department could not progress the development at the Royal Group of Hospitals site earlier than 2015. However, the Department was actively seeking the Executive's support to accelerate the process.**

**The working group asked the Head of Corporate Communication to develop a potential action plan and consider how best to utilise the small budget of £20,000 to promote a campaign aimed at bringing the date forward for the building of the hospital. This paper offers some suggestions as to how an action plan to support the campaign might look.**

### **Key Issues**

**The working group discussed the most effective approach and decided that the £20,000 that council agreed should be spent on supporting the management of a sustained campaign, the purchasing of materials, such as bannering, and the placing of any required advertising. This would be supplemented by web, media and design activity which could be provided from within the existing resources of Corporate Communications.**

It is proposed that an action plan involving activities on a monthly basis be developed and among the proposals put forward by the Head of Communications are:

- Lord Mayor visit first baby born in the Royal Victoria in 2010 (first child of the decade) and makes a statement saying that she hopes it won't be the beginning of the next decade before the new Maternity and Children's Hospital is in place.
- Meeting with local media to discuss how they might support the campaign
- A feature in City Matters providing information and a platform for the case to be made for the hospital.
- Develop an information section on our web site
- The council is currently successfully utilising Twitter and Facebook and we could announce a new forum to allow members of the public to put forward their views on this issue.
- A letter is written to all other local authorities in Northern Ireland asking for their support for the campaign on the basis that this is to be a regional hospital.
- Take out an advertisement in all three daily newspapers in which all councillors sign up to calling for work on the hospital to be brought forward
- Negotiate with broadcasters for a potential 'on air' debate on radio or television
- Host an exhibition in the City Hall in the coffee shop area or in Rotunda, showing plans for the hospital and ask public to sign a petition supporting it.
- Press could be updated as numbers signing up reach significant figures.
- Dress the City Hall in banners highlighting the campaign and subsequently moved to the roads approaching Stormont
- Timed press releases – for example at Christmas time saying that the best present for children of Belfast would be new hospital.
- Platform pieces from health/paediatric spokespersons and politicians in local press
- Political lobbying, meetings with Ministers and associated publicity
- Letters to the editor
- 'Open letters' to the Executive released to the media
- Good news stories about children being treated for illness
- Visits to the maternity/children wards at key times
- Responding to news stories/assembly debates.

It is further proposed that the all party Working Group continues to meet to oversee the campaign, approve activities, oversee expenditure and evaluate its success.



### Resource Implications

£20,000 already approved by Council in January, 2009.

### Recommendations

The committee approves:

- The Working Group's recommendation that the funding agreed by the council be used to support a sustained communications campaign by undertaken and managed by Corporate Communications
- The continuation of the Working Group to oversee campaign activities, expenditure and evaluation."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

### European Union Funded Senior Volunteering Programme

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### "Relevant Background Information

One of the Council's current priorities is improving services to older people. To ensure that this priority is given due regard across all Council services, an All Party Reference Group on Older People was set up a number of years ago, reporting to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. A cross-departmental officer group has also developed an action plan for improving these services and as part of this action plan an opportunity was identified for involving older people in a European volunteering exchange initiative.

The 'GIVE' (Grundtvig Initiative on Volunteering in Europe for Seniors) is a European initiative which was introduced in 2009. It consists of a scheme of grants to support senior volunteering projects between local organisations located in two countries participating in the European Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

The Lifelong Learning Programme offers educational opportunities to people of all ages, to facilitate formal and informal learning. Volunteering is increasingly recognised in Europe as a very valuable learning experience for people of all ages but in particular for older people as it can promote the process of active ageing and the contribution of seniors to societies.

This project offers a new European opportunity for older people and will allow them to learn, share knowledge and experience - and to 'give' - in a European Member State other than their own.

The initiative is a new form of co-operation within the Grundtvig Programme, fostering collaboration between the organisations sending and hosting volunteers. It allows organisations which join the programme to enrich their work through the exchange of good practice and create sustainable European collaboration between them.

The Programme has a number of objectives:

1. To enable senior citizens to volunteer in another European country for any kind of non-profit activity as a form of informal (and mutual) learning activity.
2. To create lasting cooperation between the host and sending organisations around a specific topic or target group.
3. To enable the local communities involved in the exchange of volunteers to draw on the potential of senior citizens as a source of knowledge, competence and experience.

Anticipated outputs are as follows:

For the volunteers:

1. Increase of personal, linguistic, social and intercultural skills and competences.
2. Contribution to the development and implementation of non-profit activities and to the community as an active citizen.
3. Acquisition / development / transmission of specific task-related skills.

For the sending and hosting organisations and the local communities in which the volunteers spend their mobility period abroad:

4. Exchange and mutual acquisition of experience, knowledge and good practice.
5. Development of European collaboration around a particular theme,
6. Intensified European outlook.

The partnership must be between 2 organisations from 2 different Member States. Each organisation will be expected to send between 2-6 volunteers and to host 2-6 volunteers during the project period. Volunteers may travel and volunteer in a group or individually. Sending and hosting may take place at the same time but does not necessarily have to do so.

In terms of volunteer profiles, the action is open to all adult citizens aged 50 or above. Particular emphasis will be given to encouraging the participation of volunteers from socially disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities, thereby helping to strengthen their integration in Europe and to combat racism and xenophobia. Equal participation of both genders is also encouraged.

Volunteer placements are carried out in one continuous period of 3-8 weeks, not including the necessary preparation and debriefing phases.

### **Key Issues**

In August 2009, the European Unit sent out a call to other European cities asking for a show of interest should they wish to partner Belfast in this exchange. Various cities made contact; however the most suitable in terms of volunteering opportunities and best practice was Madrid.

Fundacion Voluntarios por Madrid (Madrid for Volunteers Foundation), is a non-profit entity for promotion, training and advice in the field of volunteerism. It was set up in 2005 by Madrid City Council. The Foundation is chaired by the Mayor of Madrid and has Elected Members on the Board; the overall responsibility rests with the Director for Volunteering.

The strategic objectives of the Foundation are to:

1. Promote citizen participation in the voluntary sector.
2. Encourage participation of private organisations wishing to exercise Corporate Social Responsibility.
3. Involve and support the development of social organisations.
4. Offer a quality public service to facilitate the implementation of projects promoting voluntary action.

Fundacion Voluntarios por Madrid can offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities under the GIVE programme; such as working in community centres, youth training and intergenerational training.

The Grundtvig programme offers a preparatory grant for interested organisations. This grant is to allow the organisations to participate in a 2 day exchange to review their working relationship and volunteer opportunities should they embark on the programme in 2010. The deadline for the application for preparatory visits is 11 December 2009 and so the European Unit has submitted a preparatory application form to be able to undertake an exchange visit on 21-22 January 2010.

Officers from Madrid envisage visiting Belfast from 28-29 January 2010. A draft agenda for the preparatory meeting has been circulated.

Pending the success of the exchange, a final application form is to be submitted at the end of March 2010. The project, if selected, will then begin in August 2010 for a period of approximately 2 years.

### Resource Implications

#### Financial

The Council would be eligible for a grant to cover the full costs associated with hosting and sending volunteers, as well as the volunteer grant during their stay. The preparatory grant would also cover the costs of the initial visit. This means that the programme is 100% funded by the European Union. There would be no additional costs to the Council.

In terms of the volunteering element, the grant breakdown is as follows:

**Sending:** 800euro per volunteer to cover the organisations preparatory costs, cultural, linguistic and personal preparation of the volunteer and costs to cover the follow up of their experiences on return. Travel costs can be recouped as long as the duration of the stay is up to 12 weeks.

**Hosting:** As host organisation, the Council can access up to 390euro per volunteer received as well as a sum per volunteer to cover lodging, insurance, local travel and support to incoming volunteers. The exact amount for this is dependent upon the length of stay.

**Volunteer grant:** this depends on the length of the stay; it starts at approximately 1500 euro and increases on a weekly basis.

80% of the grant is received once the project is agreed, with the remaining 20% to be received once the final report has been submitted.

#### Human Resources

The project lead (an officer from the Environmental Health Service who supports the Council's work on older people) would be expected to provide direction for the volunteers in terms of accommodation, ensuring they undergo the Council induction process and child protection training (where necessary) as well as complete the relevant reports and manage mentors aligned to the project. This can be managed within existing resources.

#### Asset and Other Implications

N/A

#### Recommendations

The Committee is requested to agree to the submission of a full application to the Grundtvig Seniors Programme.

The Committee is also requested to authorise the Chair (or nominee) of the All Party Reference Group on Older People and the Council's lead officer on older people attend the development visit to Madrid on 21-22 January 2010.

#### Decision Tracking

The Head of Environmental Health will provide update reports to the All Party Reference Group on Older People and to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as required."

The Committee adopted the recommendation and granted the authority sought.

#### Consultation Response to Draft Sustainable Development Strategy

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“Relevant Background Information**

The United Kingdom government published its most recent Sustainable Development Strategy entitled ‘Securing the future - delivering UK sustainable development strategy’ in March 2005 and augmented the Strategy with a framework for sustainable development until 2020 in order to provide a consistent approach and focus across the United Kingdom. This approach was agreed by the UK Government and the devolved administrations. In its commitment to the strategic framework, the Northern Ireland Office committed to the development of a Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy, which would establish a long-term regional vision of sustainable development, together with a series of high-level objectives. The Strategy was to be underpinned by an Implementation Plan, which would set out the detailed actions to be undertaken to deliver both high and lower-level objectives and targets, based upon Northern Ireland priorities.

Accordingly, on 9th May 2006, the then Secretary of State, Peter Hain launched the first Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland entitled ‘First Steps Towards Sustainability’. The Strategy identified six priority action areas for Northern Ireland including sustainable consumption and production; natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; climate change and energy; learning and communication for sustainable development; sustainable communities; and governance and sustainable development. These six priority action areas each had their own strategic objectives and associated targets and their delivery was to be progressed through a series of Implementation Plans.

The Strategy recognised the crucial role of district councils in delivering sustainable development, highlighting that, following the Review of Public Administration, new councils would be at the centre of service delivery and civic life. The Strategy also stated that councils would be key to the planning and delivery of services within their areas and to engagement with communities. Such was the perceived importance of the local authority contribution towards sustainable development, government committed to the introduction of a new power of community planning, with a statutory duty on councils to initiate, maintain and facilitate a community planning process. The local authority contribution towards sustainable development was to be reinforced further via the introduction of a statutory duty on relevant public bodies to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

In November 2006, the Northern Ireland government published its Sustainable Development Implementation Plan, which transferred responsibility for sustainable development from DoENI to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Implementation Plan was however restricted to only three spotlight themes from the Strategy's six action areas and actions were confined to government Departments, although OFMDFM indicated that a full Implementation Plan would be developed to cover the period from April 2008. This commitment was not fulfilled and, to date, no further Sustainable Development Implementation Plans have been published. The Implementation Plan did highlight however, the commencement of the statutory duty requiring public authorities to act to promote sustainable development in the exercise of their functions. The Implementation Plan went on to confirm that OFMDFM would be liaising with local authorities and others regarding how the obligations of the statutory duty could be fulfilled. This has not occurred to date, although the Director of Legal Services has written to OFMDFM on a number of occasions requesting clarification. The Implementation Plan also indicated that the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy would be subjected to a complete review at an appropriate stage, possibly around 2010.

#### Key Issues

On 22nd October 2009, OFMDFM launched the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy entitled 'Everyone's Involved' for consultation. OFMDFM has acknowledged that the new Strategy is a significant departure from the previous publication in terms of both format and complexity, describing the new Strategy as an enabling document that reflects the vision of the Programme for Government. However, the current Programme for Government expires in 2011 and consequently it is unclear how the Sustainable Development Strategy can reflect successfully future versions. The Strategy is underpinned nonetheless by the need to secure a balance between social, economic and environmental considerations.

The overarching United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy has identified four priority areas for immediate action across the UK:- sustainable consumption and production; climate change and energy; natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and sustainable communities. The UK government has indicated that addressing these priorities will also help to shape the way the UK works internationally by ensuring that our objectives and activities are aligned with international goals. The draft second Northern Ireland Strategy appears however to have discarded these agreed objectives in favour of five alternatives:-

- **Building a dynamic, innovative and responsible economy that delivers the prosperity required to tackle disadvantage and lift people in all our communities out of poverty.**
- **Strengthening society so that it is more tolerant, inclusive of all communities and stable and permits positive progress in quality of life for everyone.**
- **Driving sustainable, long-term investment in key infrastructure to support economic and social development.**
- **Ensuring the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment.**
- **Ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint.**

The Strategy provides little in the way of explanation as to how these objectives are to be achieved or indeed the source and extent of funding available to support their delivery. Moreover, the Strategy contains no targets and nor does it include detail as to how progress towards each objective will be monitored and reported.

Despite identifying the crucial role of district councils in achieving sustainable development, the draft Strategy has been developed without input from local government and, therefore, focuses primarily upon actions to be delivered by government departments. Indeed, there is little or no detail regarding those actions to be delivered by local government including, for example, reference to the contribution of planning and development control to meeting the Strategy's social and economic objectives whilst protecting the natural environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, the draft Strategy contains a series of commitments in relation to ethical and fair trade. The UK Fairtrade Foundation has identified the fundamental role of local authorities in its Fairtrade Towns and Cities campaign, highlighting that they must pass a resolution supporting Fairtrade, and agree to serve Fairtrade products in meetings, offices and canteens. They must also participate in a Fairtrade Steering group and help to raise awareness and understanding of Fairtrade across the community. Belfast is presently jointly accredited by the UK Fairtrade Foundation and Fairtrade Mark Ireland. The Strategy fails to recognise this contribution, instead focusing upon a central government programme to promote, establish and facilitate ethical and fair trade relations. Consequently, it is recommended that the focus of the Strategy should be expanded to reflect accurately the valuable contribution from local authorities and others towards achieving sustainable development.



Nonetheless, the Strategy does acknowledge the contribution to be made by local authorities by referring to the statutory duty to exercise their functions in the manner they consider best calculated to promote the achievement of sustainable development. OFMDFM highlights that the impact of the duty to date has been marginal, citing interpretation difficulties and an absence of guidance associated with the legislation. Although OFMDFM issued draft guidance on the duty in February 2007 to a select range of consultees, a full consultation has not been completed and final guidance has not been issued to date. It is recommended therefore, that any future guidance should be developed in consultation with local authorities and should reflect the need for local authority sustainability appraisals to be applied only to significant policies or functions.

OFMDFM has indicated that the Strategy is to be supported by the development of an Implementation Plan, which is scheduled to be published in 2009. It appears that the Implementation Plan is to be restricted to government actions and as the Strategy consultation is not scheduled to close until 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010, it is unclear how OFMDFM will be able to reflect adequately consultees' comments and concerns within the Implementation Plan.

In terms of monitoring and reporting progress towards sustainable development, OFMDFM has committed to compiling a regular report containing indicators of Departments' progress against strategic objectives. It is unclear however, how contributions from the wider public sector, the community and voluntary sector and the private sector will be monitored and reported. Indeed, it is unclear how the Strategy will advance Northern Ireland's contribution towards the 20 United Kingdom Framework indicators, collated and reported by National Statistics and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Finally, OFMDFM has not indicated the lifespan of the draft Sustainable Development Strategy but has advised that it will be periodically reviewed. It is considered that such an arbitrary commitment is inappropriate and that the content of the Strategy should be reviewed and redefined in light of progress towards SMART sustainable development targets and objectives. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Strategy should be reviewed periodically to account for emerging obligations and priorities identified in forthcoming editions of the Programme for Government.

In publishing the draft Sustainable Development Strategy for consultation, OFMDFM has included a range of questions for consideration by consultees. Responses to those questions where applicable are included in the draft Council response provided in Appendix A.

## Resource Implications

### Financial and Human Resources

There are no immediate financial obligations for the Council associated with the launch of the second Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy however, there may be staff time and financial commitments associated with demonstrating compliance with the statutory duty on sustainable development.

### Asset and Other Implications

N/A.

## Recommendations

The Committee is invited to endorse the attached consultation response in respect of the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy and to recommend that it be submitted to the Sustainable Development Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister by the consultation closing date of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

## Key to Abbreviations

DEFRA - Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.  
DoENI - Department of Environment (Northern Ireland).  
OFMDFM - Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.  
RPA - Review of Public Administration.  
SMART - Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bounded.

### Appendix A - Belfast City Council response to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister consultation on the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy entitled 'Everyone's Involved'.

*Question 1 - Do you agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy presents itself as an enabling document, which paves the way for the creation of an Implementation Plan, containing explicit plans and targets in support of sustainable development? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.*

Government has determined that the goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations. Accordingly, the most recent United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy entitled 'Securing the future - delivering UK sustainable development strategy' was published in March 2005 and is underpinned by the

**UK's shared framework for sustainable development entitled 'One future – different paths', which is designed to provide a consistent approach to sustainable development until 2020. The shared framework for sustainable development comprises a shared understanding of sustainable development, a common purpose outlining what we are trying to achieve and the guiding principles that we all need to follow to achieve it, sustainable development priorities for UK action at home and internationally and the development of indicators to monitor the key issues on a UK wide basis. It also acknowledges that each devolved administration should develop its own Sustainable Development Strategy to address regional priorities as well as contributing towards the achievement of common UK goals and challenges.**

**The UK Sustainable Development Strategy identifies a series of shared priorities for action including:-**

- Sustainable consumption and production – improving the manner in which goods and services are produced to include an assessment of impacts across their whole lifecycle and reducing the inefficient use of resources, thereby boosting business competitiveness and decoupling the link between economic growth and environmental degradation.**
- Climate change and energy – securing a profound change in the way that we generate and use energy, and in other activities that release greenhouse gases.**
- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement – developing a better understanding of environmental limits, environmental enhancement and recovery where the environment is most degraded to ensure a decent environment for everyone, and a more integrated policy framework.**
- Sustainable communities – giving communities more power and say in the decisions that affect them and working in partnership at the right level to get things done.**

**Government has suggested that these shared priorities will help to shape the way in which it and the devolved administrations work internationally.**

**Accordingly, the first Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy addressed these four priority action areas from a Northern Ireland perspective. The Strategy also identified learning and communication for sustainable development and governance and sustainable development as additional regional actions. For each of these action areas, the Strategy identified clearly a vision for Northern Ireland and went on to outline strategic objectives, key targets and delivery mechanisms.**

The draft second Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy appears to have abandoned this comprehensive approach in favour of what is described as an 'enabling document, which points the way forward for our plans, rather than as a finely detailed, technically based document which is difficult to understand and of restricted interest'. OFMDFM has stated that sustainable development terminology sometimes leads to confusion, and the concept itself is often viewed as being too abstract. It should be noted however, that government departments such as DEFRA have simplified the definition of sustainable development to mitigating negative and increasing positive social, economic and environmental impacts of policies or projects. The Council is concerned that by adopting a more generalist approach and Northern Ireland specific priorities, the draft Strategy is likely to exacerbate current confusion regarding sustainable development and lose an important opportunity to stimulate action across all sectors.

For example, within the first Sustainable Development Strategy, the text clearly explained how resource efficiency, waste minimisation and materials recovery, re-use, and recycling could contribute towards improving the resource efficiency of the Northern Ireland economy to 85% by 2025. The Strategy also identified organisations and groupings that had a direct role to play in achieving this objective. This approach was replicated throughout all action areas within the first Strategy document and the Council considers that in taking a much more high-level approach to strategic direction, there is a clear risk that action will be inhibited. It is also unclear whether the numerous targets and objectives articulated within the first Sustainable Development Strategy and the actions commended in their pursuit have now been discarded.

If priority action area 5 (page 13) and its amplification on page 15 is taken as a case in point, there is a commitment to ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint. The March 2008 Department of the Environment State of the Environment Report provides a sectoral analysis of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, identifying that 34% arises from energy generation, 33% from transport, 9% from businesses, 2% from businesses and less than 1% from the public sector. The draft second Sustainable Development Strategy fails to include any characterisation of the principal sources and therefore anyone referring to the Strategy would be unlikely to appreciate the targets being pursued, the extent of remedial actions required, how to prioritise those actions and the personal contribution that they could make. Indeed, the Strategy commitment to reducing our carbon footprint also fails to make any linkage with the procurement aspects of strategic objective 1, the development aspects of strategic objective 2 and the transport provisions of strategic objective 3.

The Council urges therefore that the second Sustainable Development Strategy should include a fuller explanation of the strategic objectives and also identify the role that organisations and groupings have in achieving those objectives. The Council is also concerned at the suggestion that this action will be achieved via an Implementation Plan, to be published in 2009, given that the Plan is scheduled to conclude in 2011. It is clear that many of the strategic objectives extend well beyond 2011 and consequently, the Council considers that uncertainty regarding the content of subsequent Implementation Plans will not encourage organisations and groupings to engage with the sustainable development process. For example, in relation to climate change, the Climate Change Act 2008 introduced a long-term target of an 80% reduction in the net UK carbon account by 2050, measured against a 1990 baseline. Since this objective is unlikely to be revised for some time, the Council considers that it should be articulated within the Strategy document rather than repeated within successive Implementation Plans. This comment is also relevant to a range of other longer-term Northern Ireland strategic government publications referred to within the Strategy such as the Regional Development and Regional Economic Strategies, etc. It is recommended however, that specific targets and contributing actions should be incorporated within the Implementation Plans, as these will be expected to vary over time and with changing local priorities.

With regard to development of the Implementation Plan, it is unclear how it will be able to reflect consultees' views, given that it is to be published in 2009 and the Strategy consultation is not scheduled to close until 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

Finally, OFMDFM has not indicated the lifespan of the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy, instead stating that it will be reviewed periodically as sustainable development plans are progressed. The Council takes the view that failing to provide an implementation timetable will discourage organisations and groupings from engaging effectively with the sustainable development process.

In conclusion, it is considered that the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy will not function effectively if it is merely an enabling document as it fails to provide sufficient explanation of its strategic objectives, fails to identify strategic targets and fails to identify the important steps and contributors towards those targets. Moreover, the Strategy focuses almost exclusively upon the actions of central government and has been developed without contribution from local government and others, despite an acknowledgement that there is a critical contribution to the achievement of sustainable development to be made by district councils.

***Question 2 - Do you agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy will effectively link high-level objectives to delivery of plans? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose.***

The Council does not agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy will link successfully high-level objectives of economic prosperity, social cohesion, environmental protection and meeting national and international obligations to the delivery of plans since the Strategy document contains little explanation of the high-level objectives. The Council would also contend that the complex definitions that have been included within the Strategy (page 2-3) will do little to assist in their understanding and commitments towards 'promotion' do not adequately reflect the need for progress or action in particular areas.

The draft Strategy acknowledges that the goal of sustainable development is to put in place effective economic, social and environmental measures to ensure that we can continue to grow our economy, improve our society and communities and capitalise on our natural resources in the years to come, although the overarching ambitions of the Strategy are living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy, just and equal society. Within the Strategy, it is unclear however, where the optimum balance should lie between social, environmental and economic considerations and how this balance should be assessed. Furthermore, although government departments will be required to incorporate comprehensive 'sustainability scans' as a component of their Regulatory Impact Assessment process, it is unclear how the outcome of these 'sustainability scans' will be weighed alongside the conclusions of other impact assessments in the choice of options for a particular policy or strategy.

The Council notes that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published a 'Stretching the Web' tool to help practitioners integrate Sustainable Development considerations into their policymaking, as well as project and programme work. DEFRA has characterised the tool as a means of moving away from attaining the traditional balance between economic, environmental and social impacts by opting to mitigate negative impacts, and maximise the positive impacts of a policy, project or programme.

**From a local authority perspective, section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 imposes a statutory duty upon local authorities to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development. The duty requires a public authority to have regard to any strategy or guidance relating to sustainable development issued by the Department of the Environment and a public authority other than a Northern Ireland department must also have regard to any guidance relating to sustainable development issued by a Northern Ireland department other than the Department of the Environment.**

**The draft second Strategy document acknowledges that the potential impact of the duty is significant in providing a mandate for public sector bodies to direct their activities to achieve positive sustainable development outcomes, and to do so without compromising their other existing statutory obligations. OFMDFM has identified however, that on the basis of available information, the impact of the duty to date appears to have been marginal, adding that the duty has proved difficult to interpret for public sector bodies, in part due to the absence of guidance associated with the legislation.**

**The Council considers the lack of final guidance from OFMDFM to have been a principal barrier to interpreting and demonstrating compliance with the statutory duty. OFMDFM has now indicated that making the statutory duty more effective in supporting the delivery of a positive contribution to the sustainable development agenda from the wider public sector will be an important aspect of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy. Accordingly, the Council urges OFMDFM to engage as a matter of priority with all local authorities regarding the statutory duty and the development of supporting guidance. The Council recommends further that should OFMDFM introduce a requirement for sustainability screening, only significant local authority policies or functions should need to be appraised. Finally, the Council recommends that any compliance reporting mechanism should be straightforward and proportionate.**

**Although Belfast City Council incorporates sustainable development as a key component in its forward planning, it believes strongly that the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy needs to identify explicitly financial resources to assist with the implementation and delivery of the Strategy objectives. The Council considers that this would be the single most effective way to link high-level objectives to the delivery of local authority plans.**

***Question 3 - Do you agree with the Principles, Priorities and Strategic Objectives identified within the draft Sustainable Development Strategy? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose***

The Council notes that the draft Strategy's guiding principles have been derived from the 2005 UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy and echo those of the first Sustainable Development Strategy with the inclusion of an additional principle of promoting opportunity and innovation in order to encourage the successful exploitation of new and existing ideas to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits.

In terms of the priority areas for action, the actions articulated within the previous Sustainable Development Strategy and the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy have been omitted in favour of:-

- Building a dynamic, innovative and responsible economy that delivers the prosperity required to tackle disadvantage and lift people in all our communities out of poverty.
- Strengthening society so that it is more tolerant, inclusive of all communities and stable and permits positive progress in quality of life for everyone.
- Driving sustainable, long-term investment in key infrastructure to support economic and social development.
- Ensuring the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment.
- Ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint.

While this approach provides direct links to the 2008-2011 Programme for Government, the draft Strategy should also explain its contribution to the United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy shared priorities for action. Given OFMDFM's comments regarding confusing terminology and the need for governments around the world to make the concept of sustainable development 'real' for everyone, the Council is also concerned that the previous Strategy commitment towards learning and communication for sustainable development has not been retained. The Council is also particularly concerned that the commitment towards Sustainable Communities and the reference to the local authority role in community planning and the power of wellbeing has also been omitted from the new Strategy. This would be regarded as a key sustainable development delivery mechanism for local authorities.



The Council also notes that the previous Strategy commitment of addressing climate change and energy has been replaced with a commitment to ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable energy provision and reducing our carbon footprint. This is to be achieved by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions; increasing the proportion of energy used that is produced from indigenous, and renewable sources; ensuring affordable access to energy provision and fuel and security of supply; and planning and preparing for the impacts of climate change. It is unclear whether the previous Strategy objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 baseline levels by 2025 and making the government estate carbon neutral by 2015 have been retained. The draft Strategy also makes no reference to Northern Ireland's contribution towards the UK Climate Change Act 2008 carbon reduction target of an 80% reduction in the UK net carbon account against the 1990 baseline by 2050.

The draft Strategy has identified that a component of ensuring responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment is effective planning that enables development to meet social and economic requirements whilst respecting our natural environment. It should be noted that the transfer of responsibility for local development plans and development control and enforcement to local authorities under the Review of Public Administration is scheduled to be completed in April 2011, although this has not been acknowledged within the draft Strategy text.

*Question 4 - Do you agree the Commitments (Annex A) will be sufficient to make sure those inside and outside government contribute to the Strategy? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose*

As most of the commitments summarised in Annex A relate to government departments and include requirements for sustainability scans, which will provide SMART evidence of the inclusion of sustainability criteria and for monitoring and reporting mechanisms, the Council considers that the draft Strategy would provide adequate assurance of appropriate contribution from central government on the assumption that the obligation for government departments to contribute to the Strategy will be reinforced further via the Implementation Plan.

With regard to the local government contributions towards the Strategy, Annex A contains a commitment (9) that guidance relating to the existing sustainable development duty will be appropriate in supporting government's sustainable development ambitions. In addition, commitment 13 relates to the creation of a collaborative mechanism, which will bring together representatives from the local government sector and others with the purpose of progressing sustainable development ambitions.

Given that the Strategy acknowledges that there is a critical contribution to be made towards the achievement of sustainable development by the public sector, including district councils, the Council considers it essential that the Strategy is more explicit about the details of potential contributions across the public sector.

With regard to commitment 18, government has committed to publishing a comprehensive programme to promote, establish and facilitate ethical and fair trade relations, which support sustainable growth. It should be noted that the Fairtrade Foundation is the independent non-profit organisation that licenses use of the Fairtrade Mark on products in the UK in accordance with internationally agreed Fairtrade standards. The Foundation's mission is to work with businesses, community groups and individuals to improve the trading position of producer organisations in order to deliver sustainable livelihoods for farmers, workers and their communities. Accordingly, the Foundation provides independent certification of the trade chain, licenses the use of the Fairtrade Mark as a consumer guarantee on products, facilitates the market to grow demand for Fairtrade and enable producers to sell to traders and retailers, works with partners to support producer organisations and their networks and raises public awareness of the need for Fairtrade and the importance of the Fairtrade Mark.

In order to raise public awareness regarding the need to support Fairtrade, the Fairtrade Foundation has launched a Fairtrade Towns and Cities campaign. To become accredited as a Fairtrade Town or City, five goals must be achieved as follows:-

- The local council must pass a resolution supporting Fairtrade, and agree to serve Fairtrade products in meetings, offices and canteens.
- A local Fairtrade steering group must be convened to ensure that the Fairtrade Town campaign continues to develop and gain new support.
- A range of Fairtrade products must be readily available in the area's retail outlets to include shops, supermarkets, newsagents and petrol stations, and be served in local catering outlets such as cafés, restaurants and pubs.
- Local workplaces and community organisations including places of worship, schools, universities, colleges and other community organisations must support Fairtrade and use Fairtrade products whenever possible. A flagship employer is required for towns or cities with populations over 100,000.
- Media coverage and events must be delivered to raise awareness and understanding of Fairtrade across the community.

A number of cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland are presently accredited by the UK Fairtrade Foundation and Fairtrade Mark Ireland. Moreover, the UK government has recently also recognised the benefits of Fairtrade by agreeing to provide £12 million in funding over the next four years to the Fairtrade Foundation and its international partners in the Fairtrade Labelling Organisations.

The first Sustainable Development Strategy contained a commitment that new government contracts would specify Fairtrade products in catering facilities in all newly occupied buildings and that Fairtrade produce would be used for official hospitality. The Council contends that if the promotion of Fairtrade continues to be a strategic priority, then encouraging local authorities to support the Fairtrade Towns and Cities campaign would be an effective mechanism for ensuring its promotion.

*Question 5 - Do you agree with the scope of the four broad Key Challenges for cross-sectoral engagement set out in Chapter 3? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose*

With regard to the wider public sector, the Strategy identifies that there is a critical contribution to the achievement of sustainable development to be made by public sector bodies outside the direct control of the Executive, including district councils, government owned companies, arms-length bodies, etc.

The draft Strategy acknowledges that a statutory duty to promote sustainable development is provided for by section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, which requires departments and district councils to exercise their functions in the manner they consider best calculated to promote the achievement of sustainable development. This duty commenced from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007. The draft Strategy also acknowledges that the impact of the duty is significant in providing a mandate for public sector bodies to direct their activities to achieve positive sustainable development outcomes, and to do so without compromising their other existing statutory obligations.

As highlighted in the Council's response to Question 2, OFMDFM has identified that the impact of the duty to date appears to have been marginal, with the duty having proved difficult to interpret for public sector bodies, in part due to the absence of guidance associated with the legislation. Accordingly, OFMDFM has concluded that making the statutory duty more effective in supporting the delivery of a positive contribution to the sustainable development agenda from the wider public sector will be an important aspect of the implementation of the Strategy.

Although draft guidance in connection with the sustainable development statutory duty was issued previously for limited consultation, the Council considers the failure to develop final guidance to be an important obstacle to consistent and effective action.

Belfast City Council therefore recommends that OFMDFM should engage with all local authorities as soon as possible regarding the development of further guidance. It is also recommended that any sustainable development impact assessment should be proportionate to the extent of the likely impact and that a screening mechanism should be introduced that will ensure that only significant policies or functions need be appraised. Finally, Council recommends that any compliance reporting mechanism should be straightforward.

*Question 6 - Does the draft Sustainable Development Strategy provide you or your organisation with sufficient information to facilitate the shaping of your own sustainable development plans? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose*

In response to the publication of the first Sustainable Development Strategy, Belfast City Council reinforced its commitment towards sustainable development by including an objective of improving the quality of life, now and for future generations by creating a cleaner, more attractive, safer and healthier city, with a strong economy within its Corporate Plan and updates. The Council's 2008-2011 Corporate Plan continues this commitment by establishing sustainable development as the overarching objective within the Council's Value Creation Map.

Alongside the Council's corporate commitment towards sustainable development, a multidisciplinary Sustainable Development Steering Group was convened to deliver actions and projects within the Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan, which was developed to address the priority action areas of the first Sustainable Development Strategy.

Although the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy provides a list of strategic objectives on pages 13-15, the Council considers that insufficient information has been provided to enable the focus of the objectives to be accurately interpreted or prioritised. Moreover, it also notes that few of the objectives are applicable to local authorities.

For example, referring to the first Sustainable Development Strategy, the local authority obligation under the theme of natural resource protection and environmental enhancement regarding air quality management was clearly defined as meeting the health-based objectives for the seven key pollutants in the Air Quality Strategy by 2010. The Strategy went on to provide amplification regarding air quality reviews and assessments, preparing and implementing air quality action plans and management of local air quality.

Furthermore, with regard to the development of sustainable communities, the first Strategy highlighted a commitment to ensure that community planning is implanted within the revised local authority system. The Strategy also recognised the work of local authorities in introducing measures to reduce crime, tackle anti-social behaviour and reduce fear of crime and the local government role in delivering sustainable development in the community. There were further examples of clear direction to local authorities within the climate change and energy and governance and sustainable development sections. Accordingly, Belfast City Council considers that district councils, in common with other bodies outside central government, would be assisted greatly in shaping more effectively their sustainable development and corporate plans by a more expansive and explicit account of potential actions in support of the Strategy.

*Question 7 - We will develop indicators of sustainability which will align with the Programme for Government and national and European indicators. To what else should we have regard in doing this?*

The 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy contains a commitment to develop a new set of twenty high-level indicators, the UK Framework Indicators, to give an overview of sustainable development and progress with the priority action areas across the UK. The indicators are designed to measure progress with the Strategy's four priority action areas. DEFRA and National Statistics collate data to measure progress against these indicators and publish an annual summary report entitled 'Sustainable Development Indicators in Your Pocket - An update of the UK Government Strategy indicators'. It is unclear whether the revised priority action areas of the draft second Strategy will enable Northern Ireland to continue to make a meaningful contribution to the national indicators.

The Programme for Government 2008-2011 includes 23 Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that describe the key actions to be taken in support of the priorities, outcomes and targets to which government has committed under the five themes of:-

- Growing a dynamic innovative economy.
- Promoting tolerance, inclusion and health and well-being.
- Protecting and enhancing our environment and natural resources.
- Investing to build our infrastructure.
- Delivering modern high quality and efficient public services.

Annex one of the Programme for Government 2008-2011 provides detailed information on each of the PSAs including actions and targets. The Programme for Government also commits to putting in place a delivery framework, which establishes a robust and effective basis for monitoring and reporting of progress at a strategic level to, and by, the Executive. The Council recommends strongly that in developing appropriate indicators of sustainability, government should not simply replicate the abovementioned monitoring and reporting framework. Instead, it is suggested that OFMDFM will need to develop high-level overarching indicators that are able to reflect and summarise the social, environmental and economic contributions from the various public service agreements and present them in a format that is both relevant to and understandable by all Sustainable Development Strategy stakeholders including the general public.

*Question 8 - Do you agree that the draft Sustainable Development Strategy supports the delivery of the Executive's strategic priorities, as expressed in the Programme for Government? If you do not agree, please explain why and what alternatives you would propose*

Referring to the Programme for Government 2008-2011, the top priority has been identified as growing a dynamic, innovative economy. This is to be achieved by investing in our infrastructure, protecting and enhancing our environment and natural resources, delivering modern high quality and efficient public services and promoting tolerance, inclusion and health and wellbeing.

The Council agrees that the Strategy's objectives do support those of the Programme for Government but considers that in seeking to grow a dynamic, innovative economy, the draft second Sustainable Development Strategy should seek to incorporate the objectives of the 2009 UK Low Carbon Transition Plan - National strategy for climate and energy. The Low Carbon Transition Plan highlights that the transition to a low-carbon economy will be one of the defining issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but if delivered correctly, it will lead to a

**better quality of life, improved long-term economic health, new business opportunities in a fast-growing global sector, and, by reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, greater security of future energy supplies. Spotlight issues within the Plan include transforming our power sector so as to reduce our reliance upon fossil fuels; transforming our communities by reducing emissions from homes to almost zero through greater energy efficiency and the use of low carbon energy; transforming our workplaces and jobs to use less energy and making use of clean energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; transforming transport by using energy more efficiently and moving to more low carbon forms of energy; and transforming farming and managing our land and waste sustainably.”**

The Committee approved the draft response.

### **World Wildlife Fund Earth Hour 2010**

The Committee considered a request which had been received regarding the participation of the Council in the 2010 World Wildlife Fund Earth Hour. This was a global awareness campaign which had taken place over the previous three years whereby individuals, businesses, companies, schools and iconic buildings had been invited to turn off their lights for a period of one hour on a designated day as a means of demonstrating support for tackling climate change. It was recommended that the Council extinguish the lights at the City Hall on 27th March, 2010 commencing at 8.30 p.m. for a period of one hour in order to provide support for the campaign.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed that authority be delegated to the Director of Property and Projects to determine any future requests to participate in the event.

### **Communications Update**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided information in relation to the work which had been undertaken by the Corporate Communications Section and which provided also details of awards received by the Council in the area of communications.

Chairman