

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 7th October, 2011

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairman);
Aldermen Campbell and Newton;
Councillors McKee, Campbell, Newton, Convery,
Garrett, Haire, Hanna, Hendron, Jones, Lavery, Mallon,
McVeigh, Mac Giolla Mhín, Ó Muilleoir, A. Newton and
Reynolds.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. E. Deeny, Head of Corporate Communications;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Browne and Councillor Attwood.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 8th, 9th and 22nd September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd October.

Corporate Plan and Performance Management

Future Work Plan

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 17 June, considered that the review of the current Corporate Plan and the development of priorities and projects for the new Corporate Plan should commence in August/September through a series of party briefings and facilitated workshops for Members. The timetable for the development of the new Plan would then become aligned with the timetable for the development of the Council’s medium-term financial plan and the setting of the rate for 2012/13.**

- 1.2 The purpose of the Workshops would be to seek agreement on what Members wished to achieve by the end of the Council term and to consider how this could be delivered in the context of available resources. Among the issues which Members would consider during the next three months would be:**
- Ambition – what the Council would deliver across the City in terms of both projects and programmes;**
 - Advocacy – where and how to influence on behalf of the City;**
 - Affordability – what was achievable and realistic;**
 - Delivery – understanding what it took to get things from concept to delivery and making sure things happened; and**
 - Governance – ensuring effective decision-making and clarifying the roles of Members and officers in achieving the priorities.**
- 1.3 The first workshop, held on 17 August, incorporated two sessions:**
- 1. ‘Place-shaping’ and potentially ‘game-changing’ projects that Members wanted to see delivered in Belfast on a NSEW and City Centre basis.**
 - 2. Consideration of the Council’s Corporate Themes – leadership, economy, environment, people and communities and improving services.**
- 1.4 Subsequently, on 23 September, the Committee considered a report which outlined the direction given by Members at the workshop to inform the development of the Corporate Plan 2012-15 and an ‘investment package’ which would communicate the Council’s Commitment to tackling the effects of the economic downturn in the city.**
- 1.5 The second workshop, held on 28 September, aimed to foster an understanding of ‘city competitiveness’ and incorporated a presentation by Neil Gibson of Oxford Economics who outlined the challenges and opportunities facing Belfast and proposed what the Council may consider in supporting the economic growth of the city. The findings of the workshop will be used to inform the second iteration of the ‘Belfast Investment Package 2011’ Document.**
- 1.6 Furthermore, area based working sessions have been scheduled to take place over the coming weeks in advance of the next meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel. These sessions, will aim to build upon discussions among Members at the recent Place-Shaping workshop. The briefing sessions will enable Members to further discuss and refine the projects and priorities previously identified.**

- 1.7 Members will be aware that there are quite a few meetings, workshops and other sessions being arranged in order to complete a draft Corporate Plan as well as informing the striking of the rate. A work plan is enclosed as Appendix 1 which aims to outline upcoming issues and when they will be considered.

2 **Key Issues**

- 2.1 Through the workshops Members have stressed the need to create a long-term vision for Belfast and have identified the key elements which should be considered under the Council Corporate Themes of 'Economy', 'Environment', 'People and Communities' and 'Improve our Services'. Under the Corporate Theme of 'Leadership' Members agreed to review the Council's governance and decision making structures in order to ensure that the Council was fit for purpose and could deliver on its Corporate Plan.

Governance Arrangements

- 2.2 A vital element in the overall success of the Council's new vision for the City is our governance arrangements, that is the way in which we take decisions, are fit for purpose. The Council, through the Corporate Planning process, has emphasised that, in order to maximise the effect we can have, it is crucial that we have a positive and coherent relationship with the Northern Ireland Executive and other key partners in the City to ensure that the Council is aligned to the Programme for Government and makes maximum use of potential external sources of funding. Members have stressed the importance of the Council developing effective external relations and international relations strategies so that the Council's influence on all issues affecting quality of life can be managed effectively. Governance arrangements therefore must also have an externally focused dimension to enable effective partnership working with statutory agencies to deliver on the priorities for the City. Another important element of the governance arrangements, as agreed by Committee at its last meeting, will be to ensure that Party Leaders have the support they need to work effectively across parties in order to ensure that all strategic issues are taken forward effectively.

Council Constitution

- 2.3 Members are due to consider certain elements of the Council's Governance arrangements over the next number of months. The culmination of these deliberations will be the establishment of a Council Constitution which will set out how we take decisions, deal with the scheme of delegation,

the equality scheme, the financial regulations, codes of behaviour and the Standing Orders. The Constitution will be a key governance document which covers 'who we are', 'what we do', 'how we do it' and 'Our values. It will be a 'living' document and once updated it will be reviewed, along with its supporting documents and policies, on a regular basis to ensure they remain up to date. The Party Leaders, Party Groups and Committee will be consulted over the next few months before the new Constitution is finally submitted for the Committee's consideration.

Council Representation

- 2.4** The matter of Council representation on outside bodies and the issue of declarations of interest will be dealt with by way of two separate but complementary reports. The first will seek to establish a 'Register of Members' Interests' which will be compiled following consultation with each Member and which will be maintained and updated on a regular basis and will give advice on the declaration of private pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests at Council and Committee meetings. The second report will deal with the roles and responsibilities of Members who sit on outside bodies and will give advice on how declarations of interest which might arise through that membership should be handled. Both reports will focus on ensuring that Members are protected from any claims that relevant interests were not declared.

Decision Making Structures

- 2.5** With regard to the overall decision making structures in the Council, Members will be aware that the current Committee structure broadly reflects the Departmental structure with each Committee seeking to deliver on the priorities set out in the individual Departmental Plans. The Council has agreed through the recent Corporate Plan Workshops that it wishes to become more outward facing whilst maintaining a focus on delivering locally. Although the intention of the current Committee structure is to deliver on the key priorities in the Corporate Plan, it would be useful if the Committee could give consideration to whether this model of governance is the most appropriate for the new Council vision. One example could be to consider aligning the Committees with the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.
- 2.6** It must be stressed that this model is not being proposed to the Committee as the way forward. It is only for the purpose of opening up a discussion on how we wish to align our decision making structures with the new and more outward facing Council vision. Members' views at this early stage of

discussion would be most helpful and there will be a number of subsequent discussions at Committee and through Workshops and Briefings before any changes would be proposed to the Committee.

- 2.7 Party Leaders will meet with an external facilitator in the coming weeks to identify how best they can be supported, both individually and as a group, in helping to take forward strategic issues effectively. The intention is to produce a protocol which will ensure that the necessary mechanisms are in place to fully support the work of the Party Leaders.**

3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the foregoing report and provides direction in respect of any further work to be undertaken when reviewing the Council's governance and decision-making structures."**

During discussion of the report, Members highlighted a number of issues including the need to make best use of Councillors' limited time by rationalising and prioritising the large number of external bodies seeking Council representation; the need to ensure Members were fully involved in the process of discussion on political engagement and the protocols that might be developed to aid such engagement; the need to ensure that discussions between the Party Group Leaders were minuted and brought to the attention of the Committee; and the need for the discussion on governance to be focused on the objective of enhancing the Council's ability to serve the citizen and the City.

In response, the Chief Executive confirmed that the development of the political engagement process would be led by the Party Group Leaders facilitated by Jon Huish and that a report on the discussion would then be brought to Committee for consideration; that the minutes of the Party Group Leaders would be brought to Committee in the same manner as the minutes of the Budget Panel; and that the reviews of existing Council governance documents would be informed by best practice elsewhere and be designed to assist the Council to become more customer-focused and cost-effective.

The Democratic Services Manager indicated that a report in respect of the management of potential conflicts of interests which Members might encounter in their role as a Councillor would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November. A further report dealing with the roles and responsibilities of Members on outside bodies, including the issue of conflicts of interest, which arose due to such membership, would be submitted to the Committee in due course. He confirmed also that arrangements for the web-streaming of the Council's Monthly Meetings were at an advanced stage and that he was, in conjunction with representatives from Information Services Belfast and the Head of Corporate Communications, considering a range of issues, both operational and procedural, in this regard.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to note the report and the Chief Executive's and Democratic Services Manager's comments in relation thereto.

Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme - Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

Members are advised that during the past year local government have been working together to development a sector led ‘Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE)’ programme. The ICE programme seeks to identify potential collaborative opportunities to support service improvement and secure greater efficiencies within councils. As previously agreed by Committee, Council officers have been engaged in these discussions to explore the potential opportunities for the Council as part of its wider efficiency programme which has already recognised collaboration as one approach.

- 1.2 Although initially developed as a counter argument to the proposed establishment of a centralised Business Services Organisation to deliver a range of new functions which had been proposed to transfer to Local Government, the ICE programme seeks to reflect the vacuum created by the suspension of the RPA in June 2010, and the increasingly challenging financial environment facing councils. The stated aim of the programme is to reduce the financial burden on ratepayers and to make the Sector more efficient through identifying, sharing and implementing opportunities for improvement and efficiency via collaboration.

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 The exploratory work in relation to ICE cumulated in the release, in February 2011, of a ‘Case for Change’ document which sought to engage the sector in discussions on potential improvement opportunities. The Council submitted a detailed response to this consultation document indicating its support for the principles which underpin the ICE programme and confirming its continued involvement insofar as there may be potential tangible benefits for the Council in doing so.
- 2.2 In July 2011, a consultation findings report was issued to all councils for information summarising the feedback received on the ICE Case for Change report and setting out recommendations for moving the ICE programme forward including the establishment of a Regional Governance Group, a political forum, which would identify, consider and make recommendations to councils on potential collaborative opportunities.

2.3 Subsequently, the Chief Executive has recently received joint correspondence, dated 19 September, from the President of NILGA and Chair of SOLACE setting out proposals for the establishment of such a Regional Governance Group including its proposed role, political membership, secretarial support, resource requirements and operating principles.

2.4 In reviewing the proposals put forward, Members are asked to consider the following key issues:-

I) **Membership of Regional Governance Group (RGG) –** it is proposed that each Council is asked to nominate one political representative, and a substitute member, onto the RGG. If the Council was to consider that it should participate on the RGG it is proposed that the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be nominated to represent the Council, with the Deputy Chair as the substitute nomination.

II) **Resource Implications –** The report indicates that the only costs to be met by councils as a result of their participation on the RGG will be those relating to expenses incurred (e.g. travel to meetings) by the RGG nominated Member and the potential costs associated with hosting meetings (which are proposed to be rotated across member councils). The report further states that councils will be consulted upon any potential additional costs which may be incurred by participating councils and such costs will be estimated in advance by a business case.

2.5 Whilst there clearly remains uncertainty around the scope of potential opportunity for the Council as part of the ICE Programme, the current financial pressures facing the local government and wider public sector will undoubtedly act as a compelling driver for encouraging greater collaboration where real benefits, greater value for money and efficiencies can be demonstrated at no detriment to councils.

3.0 Resource Implications

There will clearly be staffing implications attached to the Council's continued participation in the ICE programme, albeit the level of resources has yet to be quantified.

There will also be financial costs attached to payment of Members expenses for participation on the RGG and hosting meetings as required.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- I) **consider the proposals for the establishment of a Regional Governance Group as set out in paragraph 2.4; and**
- II) **agree that the Chair of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be the nomination onto the Regional Governance Group, with the Deputy Chair nominated as substitute."**

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Appointments to Belfast Education and Library Board

The Democratic Services Manager reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 19th August, it had agreed to undertake a one-off exercise based on the d'Hondt principles in order to nominate eight Members to fill the Council's places on the Belfast Education and Library Board. He reported that, to date, six nominations had been received. The Democratic Unionist Party, which was entitled to nominate three Members, had indicated that it was prepared only to nominate one. The Party maintained that the Minister for Education should appoint that Member to the Board in line with the Council's system of proportionality on the appointment of Members to Outside Bodies.

Accordingly, the Democratic Services Manager recommended that, in order to be consistent with the approach taken by the Committee in relation to such appointments, it would be necessary to allocate the remaining places to the Parties holding choices nine and ten on the d'Hondt table, namely, Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. He recommended also that, in line with the previous stance adopted by the Council in appointing Members to the Interim Belfast Education and Library Board and the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, it would be necessary for the Council to advise the Department of Education that the application of the Council's system of proportionality to the first four nominations to the Board would provide for two Sinn Féin representatives, one from the Democratic Unionist Party and one from the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Tender for the Provision of a Council Banking Service

The Director of Finance and Resources reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 24th September, 2010 it had, in accordance with a recommendation as contained within an Audit Report on Treasury Management, granted authority for the commencement of a tendering exercise and delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Resources to accept the most advantageous tender received in respect of the Council's banking arrangements. He reported that in response to public advertisement, four tenders had been received. Each tender had been assessed in accordance with pre-agreed criteria and the most advantageous tender submitted was that by Barclays Bank. Accordingly, he requested that the Committee note the outcome of the tendering exercise.

Noted.

Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Order 55, the Director of Finance and Resources had authorised the appointment of individuals who were related to existing officers of the Council.

Chairman