

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 4th November, 2011

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairman);
Aldermen Browne, M. Campbell, R. Newton;
Councillors Attwood, Convery, Garrett, Haire, Hanna,
Hendron, Jones, Lavery, Mallon, Maskey, McKee,
McVeigh, Ó Muilleoir, A. Newton and Reynolds.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. C. Quigley, Assistant Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Mac Giolla Mhín.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 7th and 21st October 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 November, subject to:

- (i) the omission of the minute of the meeting of 21st October under the heading "Former Grove Leisure Centre" which, at the request of Alderman Browne, was taken back to the Committee for further consideration; and
- (ii) to a report being submitted to the Committee in relation to the minutes of Working Groups and how proposals contained therein could be reflected in the minutes of Committees.

Mr. J. Huish

The Committee was advised that Mr. J. Huish, Peer Elected Member from the Local Government Authority, had requested to be in attendance. The Committee acceded to the request and he was welcomed by the Chairman.

Head of Information Services Belfast

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 17th June, it had approved the recruitment process for the appointment of Head of Information Services Belfast. It was reported that, in accordance with the authority delegated to him, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Selection Panel, had approved the appointment of Mr. Paul Gribben.

Noted.

Democratic Services and Governance

Governance Update – Development of Council Constitution

The Committee submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Over the last few years the Council has been putting in place the frameworks and structures needed to make it a ‘*fit for purpose*’ local authority which can deliver the effective, value for money services that our citizens deserve. An important element of this has been the review of those key governance documents which underpin how the Council operates and makes its decisions.**
- 1.2 As agreed previously by Members, work has been ongoing over recent months to develop a draft Council Constitution which would bring together into one document the key governance instruments which explain and govern how the Council operates; and to do so in a presentable and accessible way.**
- 1.3 Members will note that the DoE issued a consultation document, on 30 November 2010, setting out local government reform policy proposals including the requirement for each council within Northern Ireland to prepare and publish a constitution. Whilst this legislative requirement does not currently exist, it is considered that the work underway will enable the Council to be more transparent and democratic, and will encourage and foster more efficient working practices.**
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current status of the Constitution and to set out a clear timetable scheduling when key strands of work will be submitted for the consideration of Committee.**

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 *Council Constitution* - This is 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 in place it, along with its supporting documents will be reviewed, on a regular basis to ensure they remain up-to-date.

2.2 There is a number of supporting governance documents which will form an integral part of the Council's Constitution, and which are currently under review to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose. These include:

1. **Corporate Plan** The Council's key strategic planning document setting out the vision and strategic objectives of the Council. As Members are aware work is progressing on the development of the new Corporate Plan 2012-2015.
2. **Standing Orders** The rules which regulate the transaction of the business of the Council and its Committees and should be read in conjunction with the Council's Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation.
3. **Financial Regulations** Provides the framework and processes for managing the council's financial affairs. Currently being updated to take account of the requirements emerging from recent legislative changes including the '*Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (NI) 2011*' - need for capital financing and treasury management strategies and a medium term financial plan.
4. **Scheme of Delegation** Sets out the types of decisions, with a key focus on operational /routine matters, which designated officers can take on behalf of the Council.

The scheme is being reviewed to update it to take account of organisational change that has taken place over the last number of years. There are no proposals to extend delegated powers merely to rationalise them.

- 5. Conflicts of Interest Policy** Seeks to establish a register of Members interests and to provide clarity in respect to declarations of interests and provide advice on the declaration of private pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests at Council and Committee meetings. A separate, but related complementary paper will address the matter of Council representation on outside bodies and the role of Members on such bodies. Work is progressing on this.
- 6. Equality Scheme** The Equality Commission published a revised Equality Guide for Public Authorities in April 2010. As part of this, the Council is required to submit a revised Equality Scheme and Action Plan.
- 7. Code of Governance** Under the '*Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006*' the Council is required to conduct a review each year of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement.
- 8. External Relations Strategy** Setting out how the Council engages and works with key strategic partners to the betterment of the city. Work is progressing on this

2.3 Work is also ongoing on a number of other related strands of work including Members and officers codes of conduct and Member-officer relationship protocols.

2.4 Members will appreciate the complexity of each of these key governance instruments and the significant amount of work required to review and update these important documents. A proposed timetable for this is set out below for Members consideration.

3.0 Going forwards

3.1 In order to inform the development of this work, there will be continued engagement with Members through established mechanisms including the Party Leaders Forum, the Budget and Transformation Panel and, as required, Party Group briefing sessions.

4.0 Resource Implications

4.1 The updating of the relevant supporting governance documents will require resourcing from Departments. Lead officers from the relevant departments have been identified to update these. A central resource from the Chief Executive's Department is co-ordinating this work and the overall collation and presentation of the Constitution.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report and the proposed timetable when reports will be submitted to Committee for consideration."

Proposed Committee Timetable can be viewed on Mod.gov – item 2a

During discussion, the Members made the following points:

- consideration needed to be given as to whether or not the Equality Scheme and the External Relations Strategy should be included within the Constitution, as unlike the rest of the documents which had some legal basis, these were Council policies;
- there needed to be a review undertaken of the Equality Scheme and how it was implemented;
- the Conflicts of Interest Policy should be progressed, with a register established as a matter of urgency;
- consideration should be given to the establishment of a Scrutiny Committee; and
- a digital strategy for the Council needed to be developed in parallel with the Constitution.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the development of the Constitution would be Member-led and would include within it only those documents which the Members decided should be incorporated.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the Corporate Plan, the External Relations Strategy and Equality Scheme were central to the Constitution as they were cross-related to the content of the rest of the documents. For example, the Corporate Plan and Departmental Plans set out Council priorities that would be managed by Council Committees and officers under the Scheme of Delegation. With regard to the Equality Scheme, all Councils were required to undertake a five-year assessment of their Scheme. In addition, a revised Equality Guide for Public Authorities had been published in April, 2010 by the Equality Commission and, in light of that, the Council would be revising its Equality Scheme and Action Plan. In relation to external relations, he explained that currently there was no consistency in relation to the representation on deputations to meet with Ministers and how the Council was represented on Outside Bodies. These needed to be considered within the context of the External Relations Strategy and the Council's overall governance arrangements.

The Democratic Services Manager stated that a report on the Conflicts of Interest Policy would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting on 18th November and that the report would propose two possible dates, that is, January, 2012 or April, 2012 for the establishment of a register of Members' interests.

After further discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report, agreed that the issue of the establishment of a Scrutiny Committee be considered as part of the development of the Council constitution and agreed also that an All-Party Working Group, consisting of Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, where appropriate, be established to progress the matter and that, in the first instance, the Working Group consider the revision of Standing Orders and the development of associated protocols.

Private Members Bill on Special Advisors

The Committee was advised that correspondence had been received from Mr. J. Allister, MLA, QC, seeking the Council's views on his proposal to introduce to the Assembly a Private Members' Bill on the subject of the appointment of Special Advisors.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the appointment of Special Advisors to a Minister in the Assembly was not a matter over which the Council had any responsibility. He pointed out that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach a consensus on this matter where there was likely to be different or opposing views taken by the various Parties. The Council's accepted practice in such circumstances was not to make a corporate response but rather leave it to the Political Parties to respond.

The Committee agreed that the consultation document be referred to the individual Political Parties on the Council.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association – Annual Conference and Exhibition

The Committee was advised that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association would be holding its Annual Conference and Exhibition on 23rd February, 2012 in the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick. The event would incorporate also the Local Government Awards. The theme for the Conference was "2012 – Positively Local" which would be aimed at showcasing and advocating the future role of efficient, effective and innovative Councils in Northern Ireland. The Council was normally represented at the Annual Conference by Association representatives and the Chief Officers. This year, the Lord Mayor would also be invited by the Association to attend the event as their guest. The approximate cost per delegate was £170.

The Committee authorised the attendance at the Northern Ireland Local Government Association Annual Conference and Exhibition of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council's representatives on the Association and the Chief Officers (or their nominees).

Finance

Efficiency Programme

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

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will be aware that to date the corporate efficiency programme has delivered savings of some £12m across the Council. At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 15 April 2011, it was agreed that a further indicative efficiency target of £2m per year for 2012-13 and 2013-14. In June 2011 Members agreed the areas where the efficiency savings should be targeted for 2012-13**

1.2 The purpose of this report is to present to Members the cash savings which have been identified and captured and to seek agreement on including them in the departmental budgets as part of the estimate setting for 2012-13.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Members should be aware that the programme has been developed in consultation with all departments and the Trade Union Efficiency Consultative Forum. We have used the same efficiency theme headings as previously agreed by SP&R Committee in May 2010. These cover the areas suggested by the HM Treasury as the fundamental key drivers for developing successful efficiency programmes.

2.2 These themes are:

- Assets and Land
- Procurement
- Budgetary Challenge
- ICT
- Service Reviews
- Income Generation

2.3 A total of £2.3m of cash savings have been identified and captured for 2012-13. The proposed split of the £2.38m efficiency target across the efficiency themes is set out in Table One below.

Efficiency Type	£
Assets / Land	198,000
Budgetary Challenge	560,934
ICT	122,060
Income Generation	755,923
Procurement	226,663
Service Reviews	516,882
Council Total	2,380,462

2.4 A summary of the savings under each theme within the proposed 2012-13 programme is provided at Appendix One.

2.5 2013/14 Efficiency Programme

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June 2011 agreed a £2m efficiency target for both 2012-13 and 2013-14. Table Two below shows that the council will have delivered £14m cash savings for the period 2006-07 to 2012-13.

This means that cash savings for 2013-14 will become more difficult to identify and take longer to realise. For these reasons work has already started to identify potential cash savings for delivery in 2013-14. This includes:

- A review of vacant posts, agency work and overtime;
- The development of a terms of reference for a review of senior management arrangements;
- A review of Fleet Management by an independent expert is near completion;
- The implementation of recommendations emanating from an independent review of procurement;
- The development of a programme to deliver further energy savings;
- The development of terms of reference to review the council's internal marketing arrangements;
- The further development of an asset management efficiency programme; and
- The further development of an ICT efficiency programme;

2.6 Further information on the development of the 2013-14 efficiency programme will be brought back to Members once the rate for 2012-13 has been set.

Table 2

Efficiencies to Date	
Year	Efficiency Savings
	£
2006/07	1,154,000
2007/08	1,500,000
2008/09	1,220,000
2009/10	3,010,000
2010/11	2,002,000
2011/12	2,900,000
2012/13	2,380,000
Total	14,166,000

3 Recommendations

3.1 Members are requested to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Agree that the £2.38m cash savings identified by the efficiency programme for 2012/13 should be captured in the departmental budgets as part of the estimates setting for 2012-13.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that a workstream be included within the Efficiency Programme to consider ways in which the Council could maximise value for money and optimise the use of some of its main assets such as the Belfast Waterfront Hall, the Belfast Zoological Gardens, Belfast Castle and Malone House. The Chief Executive pointed out that an options appraisal had already been commissioned for the Waterfront Hall to explore the potential for exhibition facilities to be created and a report would shortly be presented to the Development Committee.

Local Government Finance Act 2011

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the implications of the introduction of the new Local Government Finance Act 2011.

1.2 The Act modernises the legislative framework relating to Local Government Finance and Councillors’ remuneration. It introduces a new capital finance system and sets out the legislative framework within which the council may manage its finances. It allows the council greater freedom to manage its own finances without having to obtain consent from the Department of the Environment.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 *Annual Budget*

The full council is still required to set an annual budget, however, the Act now requires the Director of Finance and Resources to submit to the council a report on the robustness of the estimates and the council must have regard to this report when considering the estimates for the next financial year. The first report of this kind will be presented to the council as part of the rates setting process for 2012/13.

2.2 *Reserves*

The Director of Finance and Resources is now required to provide the council with a report on the accuracy of its reserves when Members are considering the estimates and setting the rate. The first report of this kind will be presented to the council as part of the rates setting process for 2012/13.

2.3 *Borrowing Powers*

The new Act retains the power to borrow but removes the requirement for prior approval being sought from the Department of the Environment. Instead the council must now comply with a regulatory framework, known as the Prudential Code, which is already being used by local authorities in the rest of the UK. The Code requires the council to demonstrate that its borrowings are prudent, affordable and sustainable. In order to comply with the Code the council must now agree a set of Prudential indicators which include the following:

1. The impact of borrowing decisions on the level of the district rate;
2. The balance between capital financing and the revenue estimates;
3. The maximum amount of borrowing the council can take on.

The council will also be required to agree a Treasury Management Strategy which will set the boundaries for how the council borrows and invests its money.

- 2.4 In summary, the Act reflects the need for the finances of the council to be aligned to the delivery of its priorities in an affordable, prudent and sustainable manner. In future, the current rates setting process will be supplemented by the agreement of the Prudential indicators and Treasury Management Strategy. To support Members in implementing these new requirements officers have been working with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) on developing a draft set of Prudential indicators and the Treasury Management Strategy. It is intended to present these to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in December for consideration and to present them for formal agreement at the January meeting.

2.5 *Capital Programme*

One of the main benefits of the new Finance Act is that the council will have greater flexibility in the way it manages the Capital Programme. At present, the annual cost of the loan repayment for a scheme is budgeted for at the point when the scheme is committed to the Capital Programme. There are times, however, when schemes are delayed for reasons such as planning permission difficulties, land issues, and scheme design problems, etc. This means that the need to borrow for such schemes is delayed. With the new Act, if the full budget

for the capital programme loan repayments is not needed in a particular year, that element of the budget which is not required may be reallocated in that year to pay for other capital schemes, on a one-off basis. Members will therefore be able to re-prioritise schemes which the council had not previously been able to commit to for affordability reasons. This will create more flexibility in implementing the Capital Programme, however, we will need to amend how smaller capital schemes are progressed through the Capital Programme approval process.

Council officers will be working with Members over the coming months to define and agree this revised process.

2.6 *Members Allowances*

The Department of the Environment has just issued draft Guidance on Councillors Allowances for consultation and this will be discussed with Members in December.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and agree to consider a draft set of Prudential indicators and Treasury Management Strategy in December.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Tender – Peace III Phase II Programmes

The Committee agreed that a report seeking approval to tender for the Peace III Phase II Programmes be withdrawn to enable it to be considered in the first instance by the Good Relations Partnership.

Asset Management

Update on the Review of Future Use and Management of the City Hall

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report providing an Update on the Review of Future Use and Management of the City Hall to enable it to be considered by the Political Parties on the Council.

Review of Council Catering Service

Arising out of discussion of the previous matter, the Committee granted authority for a review to be undertaken of the Council's Catering Service, with a report thereon to be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Consultation on the Establishment of a City Centre Waiting List

The Committee considered the undernoted report, together with the revised response which incorporated the comments made by Members at the Party Briefings:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee a draft response to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) consultation document ‘Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List attached at Appendix one. The closing date for consultation responses is Monday 7th November 2011. A copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix two.
- 1.2 A report summarising the consultation document for Members and outlining some of the key issues that the Council may wish to consider in relation to the consultation document, was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday 23rd September. Members agreed to defer consideration of a response to enable Political Party briefings to be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- 1.3 Following communication with Party Leaders, offering all parties briefing sessions, the following party briefings were organised:
 - Monday 31st October at 10.30 a.m. – Ulster Unionist Party
 - Thursday 3rd November at 2.00 p.m. – Sinn Féin

2.0 Summary of the Consultation Document

2.1 Introduction

Documentation issued by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive recommends the establishment of a new Common Landlord Area (CLA), which would be used to manage a waiting list of applicants seeking housing in the Belfast city centre area. The document states that the four main objectives of a city centre waiting list would be:

1. To take advantage of development opportunities for social housing to address housing need
2. To contribute to Planning Services and DSD policies and strategies aimed at regenerating the city centre
3. To support the wider Good Relations agenda
4. To ensure that city centre living is an option for everyone in the wider Belfast area. The document outlines that the establishment of a city centre waiting list would allow the option of city centre living to be accessible to everyone on the waiting list for Belfast and the wider urban area.

2.2 Current Situation

The Housing Executive administers and maintains a Common Waiting List which is the 'gateway' into all social housing in Northern Ireland. Applicants applying for housing or requesting a transfer normally select two locations, known as Common Landlord Areas (CLAs), where they wish to be housed.

The area which includes Belfast city centre is currently covered by eight district CLAs which were created in 2001 and are based on inner city single identity communities. These eight CLAs are:

- Cromac/Markets, South Belfast
- Sandy Row, South Belfast
- Donegall Pass, South Belfast
- Carlisle New Lodge, North Belfast
- Carrick Hill, North Belfast
- Brown Square, Shankill
- Hamill/John Street, West Belfast
- Bridge End, East Belfast.

2.3 Housing Market Context

The document advises that recent research by the Housing Executive has identified potential for 11,500 apartments to be located in the city centre of which 3,900 are completed (3,000 private and 900 social), and 1,048 are under construction with a further 6,400 apartments with planning approval or planning applications pending. The document highlights that this has now created new opportunities for social housing.

A number of potential social schemes have been identified by the Housing Executive which will be delivered as either stand alone social housing schemes or as part of a larger comprehensive development site. The document highlights the following examples:

Stand Alone schemes identified

- 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments)
- The annex adjoining the Obel building (49 apartments)

Potential development sites identified

- Titanic Quarter
- Former Sirocco Works.

2.4 Options and their consideration

Three options were assessed in terms of meeting the objectives (outlined above):

Option 1 – Do Nothing

Does not address objectives 2, 3 or 4 and only partly addresses objective 1. For example in relation to the potential acquisition of accommodation for social housing in the Obel complex, with the current boundary arrangements allocations would be made solely to applicants on the Carlisle/New Lodge waiting list. Similarly, 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments) is currently located within Sandy Row (CLA).

Option 2 – Belfast City Centre including existing single identity communities

The boundary of the new Common Landlord Area (CLA) in this option mirrors the boundary of Belfast city centre as defined by Planning Service in the Belfast Metropolitan Plan (BMAP). The document states that this option only partially meets the objectives. It would assist in contributing to regeneration strategies and promoting shared space. However, it stresses that this option may be unacceptable to a large number of applicants who would wish to be housed in a particular single identity estate.

Option 3 – Belfast City Centre excluding single identity communities

This option is similar to option 2 but excludes the established single identity social housing estates outlined above. The document considers that this option best meets all the objectives in terms of making the best use of development opportunities, assisting regeneration strategies and promoting shared space and widening the opportunity of living in the city centre. Applicants requesting rehousing in the city centre CLA would be considered for all new social housing and future relets for schemes completed after 2011. The Housing Executive believes that this option would give applicants a definitive choice and clearly demarcates the city centre from the single identity CLAs surrounding the city centre.

The document recommends that a Belfast city centre waiting list is created on the basis outlined in Option 3.

3.0 Resource Implications

N/A.

4.0 Equality Implications

EQIA Screening

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive equality screened the consultation document with the following findings:

The Equality screening concluded that there were some minor impacts identified but that these were addressed in Option 3. On that basis it was decided that an Equality Impact Assessment was not required.

5 Recommendations

To consider the draft consultation response and to approve the response to the consultation document and its submission to NIHE

6.0 Documents attached

Appendix One – Draft consultation response – NIHE ‘Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List’

Appendix Two – Consultation document – NIHE ‘Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List’.

Appendix 1

**Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Consultation on
the 'Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List'**

Belfast City Council Response

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NIHE consultation on the Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List.

The Council welcomes the recommendation in the consultation document to promote shared housing in the city centre and this is in line with current council policy objectives in creating a vibrant, inclusive, safe and accessible city centre. We acknowledge reference in the document that the establishment of a city centre waiting list will assist Belfast City Council in its strategy to secure shared city centre living.

The Council has revised its Good Relations Plan for the next three years. The plan highlights that the Council believes that equality and good relations are central to the economic regeneration and city development agenda. In order to attract talent, sustain inward investment, generate tourism and tackle poverty, it is critical that we maximise the potential of the city centre as a shared space in which everyone can participate. One of the key principles of the plan is that the Council will work with other partners across the city to support initiatives that will consolidate existing shared spaces and create new shared spaces within the city.

The Council recognises that the NIHE's preferred option, Option 3 - to create a Belfast city centre waiting list excluding single identity communities, would encourage more people to live in the city centre and would be a significant step forward for the city in terms of creating shared space.

We support the option of a Common Landlord Area in the city centre, which does not preclude the choice of those citizens wishing to reside in single identity areas. We welcome this new proposal to be an additional choice designed to meet the needs of those people who have expressed a preference to reside in a shared housing area. Combined with other developments that are planned for the city, we believe that there would be benefit in developing an enhanced and integrated strategy for housing in Belfast, which supports a positive mix of tenure as well as ensuring that the appropriate facilities and infrastructure are in place to support city centre living.

The Council recognises the importance of a shared, welcoming and accessible city centre to economic growth and the success of the city. By encouraging and enabling people to live in the city centre, this will have implications for infrastructure and broader regeneration for residents to ensure the 'live-ability' in terms of access to appropriate facilities and services, e.g. playgrounds. The Council supports 'life time home' standards in order to build a settled population in the city centre. A settled population will enable a sense of community, which is vital to build pride and manage potential anti social behaviour issues.

It is critical that city centre schemes are well-managed and well designed. Given the success of existing concierge schemes, the Council would recommend that consideration is given to this within the proposals. The Council would highlight that designing out crime must be integral to the design process.

The Council would support a mix of prospective properties/medium density to include accommodation for both families and older people. Housing should be affordable and NIHE should consider some form of incentives to build the success of the scheme.

Work with existing city centre communities is critical to the scheme in order to ensure its success.

The Council has a very positive working relationship with the NIHE on a range of areas, including the promotion of good relations. We currently support the Housing Executive's Local Area Networks Programme, which seeks to link neighbouring communities across interface areas. This is supported through the council's Peace III funding programme. This proposal for city centre work would be a fruitful extension of this partnership. Previous initiatives that the Council has worked in partnership with NIHE, include the Town Centre Living Initiative (also known as 'Living over the Shops') on arterial routes. Through this, we sought to animate arterial routes to put life back into the street and re-establish a community presence in the area, particularly after shop opening hours. On this rationale, it is anticipated that the proposed approach will deliver similar outcomes such as increased perceptions of safety and increased footfall after dark in the city centre.

The Council is in ongoing negotiations with NIHE and the Department of Social Development (DSD) about a Housing Renewal approach in the Holyland area of the city, which could involve the conversion of some properties to make them suitable for single occupancy use and then making them available to those on the social housing list. This development should be considered in respect of the creation of a city centre waiting list.

Belfast City Council welcomes the focus on creating a shared city centre space in Belfast and promoting shared living and good relations in the city. The Council recognises that the recommendation in the document would widen the opportunity for city centre living to the greater Belfast area as well as supporting existing city centre regeneration strategies. Given the importance of the proposed scheme the Council and its elected representatives look forward to working with the NIHE on its implementation and monitoring of the performance of the scheme.”

The Committee approved the foregoing comments on the Council’s response to the consultation document.

Chairman