

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd August, 2013

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Robinson (Chairman);
Aldermen Browne, M. Campbell and R. Newton;
Councillors Corr, Haire, Hargey,
Jones, Lavery, Maskey, Mullan,
McCabe, McCarthy, McVeigh,
Reynolds and Spence.

In attendance: Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager;
Mr J. Walsh, Legal Services Manager; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Attwood, Hendron, Mac Giolla Mhín and A. Newton.

Declarations of Interest

The Chairman (Alderman Robinson) declared an interest in respect of item number 7(b) insofar as he was Special Advisor to the First Minister; and Councillor McCarthy declared an interest in relation to item 3(a) in that he was on the board of the World Police and Fire Games.

Investment Programme

Local Investment Fund

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 At its meeting in April 2012, the SP&R Committee agreed to convene Area Working Groups (AWGs) to support effective ‘place-shaping’ and make recommendations on investment decisions for their local area including the Local Investment Fund (LIF).**

- 1.2 The £5million LIF was established to support the delivery of key local regeneration projects in neighbourhoods and as a means for Members to connect with local communities in their area, in preparation for their formal role in community planning under the RPA. SP&R Committee agreed on 23 March 2012 that there was a minimum level of investment through LIF of no less than £15,000 and unlikely to exceed £250,000 to ensure focus on more local investments and the opportunity for a broad spread of investment across the city. North, South, East and West AWGs were allocated £1,127,500 each, with a proportionate amount of £490,000 for the Shankill area.
- 1.3 A Feasibility Fund was established as a ring fenced fund of £500,000 to enable initial feasibility work to be undertaken on proposed projects to bring them to a point where Members could decide if they should be progressed as Capital or Belfast Investment Fund schemes. SP&R at its meeting on 21st September 2012 agreed the governance arrangements for the Feasibility Fund and agreed that because no proposals were being taken forwarded in the 2012/13 financial year under BIF that each Area working Group would be able to *'consider and recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, a maximum of five Local Investment Fund proposals per area which should proceed to feasibility study stage'* obviously feasibility studies for these schemes must be proportionate to LIF expenditure levels.

2.0 Area Working Groups –Key Issues

- 2.1 At the most recent round of AWG meetings, officers updated Members on the external meetings they have facilitated on the LIF proposals. In accordance with Council procedures, individual Members declared any conflicts of interest and this was noted in the minutes of the AWG. On the basis of the information presented, the following AWGs have made recommendations for the consideration of the Committee:

SHANKILL AWG

- 2.2 Members are asked to note that the Shankill AWG at its meeting on 3rd July agreed that the High Sheriff, Councillor Brian Kingston, be elected as Chair of the Shankill AWG.
- 2.3 *LIF recommendations* - On the basis of the information presented, the Shankill AWG made the following recommendation for the consideration of the SP&R Committee:

Proposal	Ref No.	Up to £	AWG Comments
Ballygomartin Presbyterian Church	ShLIF026	£27,680	
St. Mary's Church, Crumlin Road	ShLIF027	£24,320	

Feasibility study recommendations

- 2.4 The Shankill AWG considered the potential for feasibility support and recommends to the SP&R the following as a feasibility project:

Project	Ref No.	Comments
North Belfast Working Men's Club	-	Feasibility study

- 2.5 Members are asked to note however that as outlined in 1.3 above, SP&R Committee had agreed that each Area Working Groups would be allowed to recommend 'a maximum of five Local Investment Fund proposals per area which should proceed to feasibility study stage'. The proposal by the North Belfast Working Men's Club does not fit with this criterion as it was not proposed as a Local Investment Fund project and Members are therefore asked to consider if they wish to recommend this.

SOUTH AWG

- 2.6 ***LIF recommendations*** - On the basis of the information presented, the South AWG made the following recommendation for the consideration of the SP&R Committee:

Proposal	Ref No.	Up to £	AWG Comments
Annadale/Haywood Residents Association		£102,959	Subject to match funding being secured within a period of 12 months, and on the understanding that a South AWG study visit be undertaken to the premises prior to the request for funding being considered by SP&R (scheduled to take place 14th August)

Local Intervention

- 2.7 The South AWG made the following recommendation for the consideration of the SP&R Committee in relation to their Local Intervention money:

Proposal	£	AWG Comments
Stranmillis Road Business Association	£10,000	That £10,000 be allocated from the South AWG Local Intervention Fund for specific retail development and promotional activities on the understanding that the Association would contribute a sum of 10 per cent in addition to the amount granted by the AWG

Local Investment Fund – Next Steps

- 2.8 Members are asked to note that if the recommendations as above are approved by Committee the full allocation of £5million under the local Investment Fund will be committed in principle to 67 projects across the city. A full list of proposed LIF projects has been circulated. To date 20 projects totalling £1.26m have received funding formal agreements.
- 2.9 Members are aware that every LIF project that has been approved in principle for funding is subject to a rigorous due-diligence process as previously outlined to Members. This due diligence process looks in detail at a range of issues including governance; security of tenure; proposed approach to procurement; financials; statutory consents; sustainability and accessibility issues. The due-diligence process also ensures that the support is eligible under the Local Government Finance Act 2011 and the Local Government Accounts and Audit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. This information is then scrutinised by a Due-Diligence working group which has been set up to oversee this process. Members are aware that a project proposal will not receive a Letter of Offer or Funding Agreement before all due-diligence information is received and has been signed off by each individual section (Property & Projects, Legal Services, Estates, Urban development Unit and Financial Services) as being satisfactory and meeting all requirements.
- 2.10 Due-diligence work is continuing on the other projects which have been approved in principle and officers are working closely with groups to ensure that all information is being forwarded to the Council. Reports on the progress of individual projects in each area will be brought to Area

Working Groups at their regular meetings. As such, it is recommended that Area Working Groups would be notified at these meetings of those funding agreements that are ready to be issued; at which time arrangements can be made through the Chair for appropriate communications activity. Members should be aware however that there may be circumstances when funding agreements need to be released in advance of scheduled meetings. In these circumstances it is recommended that officers notify the Chairperson of the relevant Area Working Group and subsequently report back at the next available opportunity to the full AWG.

- 2.11 Finally, Members are also asked to note however at this stage that there may be projects which do not satisfactorily meet all the due-diligence requirements and where the Council will be unable to commit money as agreed to the project. In these circumstances, the money that had been allocated to these projects could be considered for reallocation by the Area Working Group. If this situation arises, it is proposed that Area Working Groups would be able to consider both existing alternatives or new proposals and may recommend the reallocation of the money from within their area budget. As per the existing process these recommendations will be subject to approval by the SP&R Committee and must be within the scope of the LIF funding and the original overall allocations to AWGs.

3.0 *Update on Social Investment Fund and BIF Implications*

- 3.1 Members should note that, following a meeting with senior OFMDFM officials, it is understood that decisions on the first round of Social Investment Fund (SIF) schemes will be announced by early autumn. Given the potential linkages between a number of SIF schemes and the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Members are asked to now give due consideration to the first phase of BIF. In doing so Members will have the opportunity to consider how this strategic investment will benefit the needs of the city as a whole while complimenting local investment through LIF and SIF.
- 3.2 A further issue concerning BIF is growing frustration in some AWGs due to the fact that some groups are clear on which projects they wish to proceed with while others are not. Officers are being pressurised to move schemes on including spending money on various preliminary studies but cannot do so without SP&R Committee agreement on the projects.
- 3.3 When the AWG system was established in April 2011 it was envisaged that the groups would by this stage have area plans

and governance issues resolved allowing decisions on BIF expenditure to be more strategic City wide. However, the impact of SIF together with the upcoming pressures of Local Government Reform, the Leisure Transformation Programme on top of the Investment Programme may mean it is unrealistic to expect the issues of area planning and governance to be resolved quickly. If Members accept this scenario it would be helpful if the Committee could ask the AWGs to prioritise some BIF proposals so that the Committee can decide if there are schemes it wishes to move forward.

4 Resource Implications

4.1 Human – Resources are currently allocated to individual projects

4.2 Financial – Proposed allocations as outlined in the report and summary detailed below:

AWG	(A) LIF Allocation	Amount allocated June 12- June 13 (B)	Proposals in this report (C)	(D) Projected Allocation (b) + (c)	Remaining amount (A) – (D)
East	£1,127,500	£1,127,500	-	£1,127,500	£0
South	£1,127,500	£1,024,541	£102,959	£1,127,500	£0
West	£1,127,500	£1,127,500	-	£1,127,500	£0
North	£1,127,500	£1,127,500	-	£1,127,500	£0
Shankill	£490,000	£438,000	£52,000	£490,000	£0
TOTAL	£5,000,000	£4,845,041	£154,959	£5,000,000	£0

5 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

5.1 The overall LIF programme will be screened at regular intervals to ensure that the Council is fulfilling its obligations as part of the Equality Scheme as well as ensuring that it is in line with the Investment Programme's underpinning principles related to good relations and balanced investment.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and:

- note that Cllr Kingston has been elected Chair for the Shankill Working Group and that Chairs have now been elected for each Area Working Group
- approve in principle the allocation of Local Investment Funding as proposed by the Shankill and South Area Working Groups as set out in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.6 above
- note that the Shankill proposal for feasibility for the North Belfast Working Men's Club does not meet the criteria as previously agreed and the Committee is therefore asked if they wish to agree this feasibility study
- agree the Local Intervention recommendation as proposed by the South AWG for £10,000 for the Stranmillis Road Business Association for retail development and promotional activities on the understanding that the Association would contribute a sum of 10% in addition to the amount granted by the AWG
- note that, if the SP&R Committee agrees with the funding proposals as above, that the full £5million which was set aside for the Local Investment Fund has now been allocated. A full list of the proposed LIF projects has been circulated
- agree that Area Working Groups should be notified at their scheduled meetings of those funding agreements that are ready to be issued; at which time arrangements can be made through the Chair for appropriate communications activity
- agree that in circumstances when there is a need to release a funding agreement in advance of the next scheduled meeting officers should notify the Chair of the relevant AWG and report back at the next available opportunity to the full AWG
- note that there may be instances going forward where projects do not satisfactorily meet all the LIF due-diligence requirements and where the Council will therefore be unable to commit money as agreed. If this arises, it is proposed that the relevant Area Working Group will be able to consider alternatives and may recommend the reallocation of money to other projects. As per the existing process, these recommendations

will be subject to approval by the SP&R Committee, within the scope of the original allocations to AWGs

- **Note the position on BIF projects and seek to ensure some are prioritised to allow progress.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Leisure Transformation Funding

The Director of Parks and Leisure submitted for the Committee’s consideration the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant background information

1.1 Under the Investment Programme Implementation Plan, agreed by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June 2012, Deloitte MCS Limited was appointed to undertake a project to enable the re-development of the leisure estate. In March, Deloitte presented their recommendations to Committee which included 3 ‘business model’ options going forward:

- 1. Non-profit distributing organisation e.g. social enterprise as a new organisation**
- 2. Transformed in-house council-run services, supported by external expertise**
- 3. Private sector**

In this context, SP&R agreed the urgent need for fundamental change, with a focus on delivering better health outcomes and improved value for money. Committee also agreed the indicative phasing of capital transformation:

- **Phase 1: Investment Programme (Windsor/Olympia; Andersonstown; Girdwood)**
- **Phase 2: Reform of Local Government (e.g. Avoniel; Castlereagh; Lagmore/Poleglass/Colin)**
- **Phase 3: One Public Estate(e.g. Ballysillan; Ozone; Shankill; Loughside; Whiterock).**

1.2 At its meeting in June, SP&R set a £105m capital expenditure affordability limit for the leisure transformation programme. The committee also agreed a capital financing strategy which includes allocating £3.23m of the £6m Belfast Investment Fund annual rates contribution to finance the £38m Olympia and Andersonstown schemes and £2m efficiency savings from the leisure service budgets, deliverable by 1 April 2016.

1.3 At the June committee, Members also agreed to consider a report in August on the resourcing requirements of the Leisure Transformation Programme. This report outlines the required resources and how they can be financed.

2. Key issues

2.1 The transformation programme consists of a number of key areas of work:

- Better Services: delivery of increased health outcomes through improved programming, marketing, etc.
- Better Business: transformed business operating model to deliver improved value for money and a sustainable service
- Better Assets: capital programme of modern, fit-for-purpose facilities across the city.

2.2 Over the coming months there are 4 stages:

1. Information gathering – ongoing

This information-gathering phase will include study visits to good practice sites and research on all 3 Deloitte recommended options (as described above) including social enterprise models and in-house transformation processes. This information will provide the necessary baseline information, as well as highlight potential strategic partners with the relevant expertise.

2. Developing the business case – up to November 2013

A detailed analysis of the pros and cons, benefits and costs of each option will be presented to Committee in late 2013. This will outline the potential to deliver against the efficiencies target as set by SP&R. It will also set out the various legal, procurement, governance, asset and human resource implications of each option. The business case will also include the key political ambitions on health outcomes and potentially set out a number of key principles at the outset of the transformation programme.

3. Developing the transformation plan – up to March 2014

Consequent to Committee's decision in late 2013, an intensive period to develop a transformation plan will follow. This will include for SP&R's consideration: business strategy; governance; finances; and performance targets. The

transformation plan will also include the fully scoped capital programme across each area of the city, based on the affordability limits already agreed. The transformation plan will give assurance that the efficiencies targets, agreed as part of the capital financing strategy will be met.

4. Implementation – up to March 2015

The implementation phase will include a concentrated focus on the human resources aspect of the transformation, including staff learning and development, as well as reform of working practices. This period will also include detailed work on developing the necessary business cases for Phase 2 capital projects, as well as detailed scoping of the agreed Phase 3 projects, to ensure balanced investment across the city. Work will also be undertaken on re-shaping the programmes and services to deliver against the agreed health outcomes targets.

- 2.3 A detailed plan for the next 18 months has been developed, covering these 4 stages. A critical pathway overview is attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.4 In order to deliver this, there are a number of key areas of resources that are required to uplift the organisation's capacity to ensure delivery. These resources and costs associated are detailed in appendix 2 and include:
- Expert advice on options available for business operating models and specialist leisure advice on marketing, programming and product development
 - Additional project sponsors to develop Phase 2 and 3 capital projects
 - Human resources advice and support on working arrangements, trade union consultation and negotiations, job evaluations, learning and development
 - Communications and engagement in relation to capital programme delivery and staff engagement
 - Legal advice on business model options, resource implications, contracts and procurement
 - Independent cost control analysis to provide assurance to Members on affordability and deliverability.

It is estimated that the total cost for this resource will be £1.15m. The Director of Finance and Resources has agreed that these costs are non-recurrent in nature and, if agreed, should be funded from reserves. The general reserves currently stand at £13.3m. A £1.15m reduction will still leave reserves at an adequate level.

- 2.5 Members are also asked to consider a request for delegated authority for the Chief Executive to undertake any procurement processes or recruitment required. This will be within the agreed budget, with no impact upon the rate, and any staff resources put in place will be on a fixed-term/temporary basis. These will be guided by normal recruitment and selection and procurement practice and procedures.
- 2.6 Members recognise the compelling case for holistic and urgent transformation of the Council's leisure services and estate. Given the unprecedented scale of the business transformation, linked to the realisation of the ambitious capital programme of £105m, Members are requested to consider the request for dedicated resources' as set out above.

3.0 Decisions required

Members are asked to:

- 3.1 Consider the contents of the report and agree the leisure transformation programme (LTP) outline plan attached at Appendix 1
- 3.2 Consider and agree the resources plan attached at Appendix 2
Agree to allocate £1.15m from reserves to the Leisure Transformation Programme.
- 3.3 Agree that delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive to put in place appropriate capacity and staff resources to support delivery of LTP."

4.0 Resource Implications

Human: This will be a major physical and service transformation process and the implications for staff will be fully assessed as part of the development of the transformation plan.

Financial: The £1.15m cost for the outlined additional resources required to develop the transformation plan

Assets: To be scoped and presented to Committee for consideration by March 2014.

5.0 Equality Implications

Provision has been made within resources to screen the Leisure Transformation Programme at relevant intervals in line with the Council's equality obligations."

The Committee adopted the recommendations

Super Connected Cities

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

1.0 Members will recall on 24 May 2013 the Committee was informed of the changes that had been made to our super-Connected Belfast project by the Department of Culture Media & Sport (DCMS). These changes required a revised project plan to be submitted to DCMS for approval.

1.2 Following the submission of the revised plan the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Ed Vaizey MP, wrote to the Council confirming that our proposals have been approved in principle and that funding for the following projects would be made available:

- Up to £9.8m for a voucher scheme
- Up to £1.31m on a wireless concession for the city centre
- Up to £2.35m on wifi in public buildings.

1.3 The Minister also assessed our voucher preparations to be strong and requested that Belfast form one of the first cities to market test the voucher scheme. A copy of the Minister's letter has been circulated

2 Key Issues

2.1 Belfast Voucher Scheme

The voucher scheme provides up to £3,000 to a business to enable them to access ultrafast broadband. Companies can choose from a range of potential telecoms suppliers who deliver broadband services in their area. The aim of the market testing of the voucher scheme is for DCMS to ascertain whether this will generate objections from telecoms suppliers and to demonstrate if demand for a voucher scheme is high

enough to roll out on a national level. The market testing phase will run from 1 August 2013 to 30 September 2013.

2.2 Given the very short timeframe set by DCMS, as well as the need to demonstrate a significant level of demand, in line with our original funding approach, a number of target locations were identified for the market-testing phase. These are:

- Cathedral Quarter
- City East / East Belfast Enterprise
- Ormeau Business Park
- Ortus
- Argyle Business Park
- North City Business Centre
- Harbour Estate.

2.3 All SMEs, third sector and public sector organisations based within these locations are eligible to apply for a voucher during the market-testing phase. It is anticipated that the scheme will be rolled out city-wide from November 2013, following a review of the market tests and subject to approval by DCMS. As part of our market testing phase we are taking registrations from outside the target zones to gauge demand and to inform our future roll out plans.

2.4 Full details of the voucher scheme can be found on the Council's website at [Voucher scheme](#).

2.5 *Metro Wireless*

Work is well underway to progress a procurement to award an exclusive concession contract for the provision of a public city centre wireless solution.

2.6 We are currently specifying a technical design for a mini-pillar that will provide a 24 hour power supply and broadband connectivity to a wireless access point mounted on a street lighting column. This will be passed to Roads Service, NIE and telecoms suppliers to be signed off as an agreed technical solution at the beginning of September.

2.7 *Public Wi-Fi Hotspots*

A number of the organisations who operate buildings to be considered for this programme have signed 'Memorandums of Intent' during the creation of our initial bid. It is our intention to re-engage these organisations with further details of this programme and to ascertain their current positions, requirements, and any constraints before completing a

specification for the procurement of this strand of the Super-Connected Belfast scheme.

2.8 Demand Stimulation

The Director of Development is currently working on a demand stimulation programme to support the Voucher Scheme. The purposes of the programme are to raise awareness of the infrastructure investment and provide targeted mentoring support to help businesses get online or use the technologies to help them work more efficiently.

3 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

3.1 There are no specific Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to:

Note the progress of the Super Connected Belfast Project.”

The Committee noted the information which had been provided

Woodvale Park

The Director of Parks and Leisure submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report in relation to the incidents which had occurred at the Woodvale Park on 6th August prior to the official opening ceremony.

Noted.

Democratic Services and Governance

Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality

The Committee considered the undernoted requests for the use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality:

	Event/Date - Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Mothers' Union	Mothers' Union General Meeting Welcome Reception 20th June, 2014 Approximately 100 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits	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' 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 £250
Queen's University Belfast, and Civil Engineering Research Association of Ireland	Civil Engineering Research in Ireland 2014 Conference Dinner 28th August, 2014 Approximately 150 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 wine and soft drinks Approximate cost £500
Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland	Rotary International Conference Reception 10th April, 2015 Approximately 500 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 wine and soft drinks Approximate cost £500
Ballinacarrick Masonic Lodge No. 670	75th Anniversary Ball 26th April, 2014 Approximately 150 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	This event will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the formation of the Ballinacarrick Masonic Lodge No. 670 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 'City Leadership, Strong, Fair and Together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wine and soft drinks Approximate cost £500

Deafblind NI	<p>Launch of Deafblind NI</p> <p>19th September, 2013</p> <p>Approximately 100 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p>	<p>This event will launch the Deafblind NI Charity which will provide care and assistance to residents of the City and further afield who feel marginalised by their disability. It will aim to highlight the services provided for those who suffer from the dual sensory loss ranging from a peer support group to a network of home 'befrienders'.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p> <p>Approximate Cost £250</p>
World Police and Fire Games	<p>Medal Presentation to Medical Volunteers</p> <p>25th September, 2013</p> <p>Approximately 500 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p>	<p>This event will provide an opportunity to recognise the medical help and support provided by the three volunteer medical organisations, St. John Ambulance, Order of Malta and British Red Cross during the World Police and Fire Games.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City leadership, strong, fair and together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p> <p>Approximate cost £1,250</p>
NOW	<p>Graduation Ceremony</p> <p>13th November, 2013</p> <p>Approximately 250 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall</p>	<p>This event will highlight the work of NOW an organisation which provides training and employment services for people with learning difficulties. It will aim to demonstrate that Belfast is a city that supports people with all levels of learning difficulties and will provide the much needed support for integration into all areas of public life.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together', 'Better support for people and communities' and 'Better</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall</p>

			opportunities for success across the city'.	
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	Volunteer Recognition Event 14th November, 2013 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 recognise the work of the volunteers who have played an important role in providing support to those most in need. The event will highlight the need to encourage all citizens to take personal responsibility for preventing cruelty to children. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City leadership, strong, fair and together', 'Better support for people and communities', 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 £375
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Silver Award Presentation 8th November, 2013 Approximately 500 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits	These awards aim to recognise the development of citizenship amongst young people and to acknowledge the newly found skills and talents which will enable them to develop and mature as individuals. This event meets the Council's key themes of 'Better support for people and communities' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city' and in addition would contribute to the Council's thematic area of Children and Young People.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits Approximate cost £1,250

<p>Barnardo's Northern Ireland Tuar Ceatha</p>	<p>"Celebrating Diversity in Belfast" 20th November, 2013 Approximately 100 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p>	<p>This event will aim to showcase the work of the Tuar Ceatha service which is provided to families from the black, minority ethnic, refugee family and asylum seeking communities. The awards ceremony will seek to celebrate the diversity and contribution of not only the staff but all their service users. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City leadership, strong, fair and together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits Approximate cost £250</p>
<p>Suicide Awareness and Support Group</p>	<p>Celebration of Life Event 10th September, 2013 Approximately 400 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits</p>	<p>This event will highlight Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day and will provide an opportunity for families to obtain support and promote awareness around health and suicide related issues. This event would contribute to the Council's key themes of 'Better Support for People and Communities' and 'Better services – listening and delivering'.</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and biscuits Approximate cost £1,000</p>
<p>MT4UTH (Musical Theatre Youth) 4</p>	<p>Carols in the City 15th December, 2013 Approximately 600 attending</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits</p>	<p>This event will aim to bring together choirs and musical organisations from all areas of Belfast and will incorporate contributors from socially deprived communities in the City. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together', 'Better support for people and communities' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city'.</p>	<p>The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits Approximate cost £1,500</p>

Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke	Belfast City Marathon Coffee Morning 24th April, 2014 Approximately 300 attending	Use of the City Hall	This event will highlight the work of the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association. The event will aim to raise awareness of the help and support available to people living with respiratory conditions. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Theme of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.	Use of the City Hall
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The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Severance Scheme for Councillors

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 19th April, 2013, it had approved a response to a consultation document issued by the Department of the Environment in relation to severance arrangements for councillors.

The Democratic Services Manager reported that legalisation introducing a one-off severance scheme for councillors had now been made and had come into operation on 1st August. The legislation, entitled the Local Government (Severance Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, set out the details of the severance arrangements for Councillors and a copy was circulated for the information of the Members.

In order to meet the eligibility requirements of the severance scheme, a serving Councillor must have a minimum of twelve years service, excluding any periods when the councillor was also an MLA, MP and MEP, with service being counted on a cumulative basis. The first application period had commenced on 1st August and would close on 31st December, 2013, the second period would run from 1st January, 2014 until the closing date for nomination as a candidate in the next local government elections. Councillors who applied during the first application period must resign by 31st December, 2013 and those who applied during the second application period must resign by 31st March, 2015.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that there would be a graduated payment system of two bands. There would be an annual rate of £1,000 for any service

during the period from 30th May, 1973 to 21st May, 1988, and £600 per year for service thereafter. Periods when the councillor was also an MLA, MP or MEP would be discounted when calculating the award. The value of a payment to an individual councillor was limited to a maximum of £35,000. Councillors would receive a severance payment on, or shortly thereafter, the date of their resignation. It would be the responsibility of individual councils to make the payments and the cost would be refunded by the Department of the Environment. An application for a severance payment from a councillor who goes forward for nomination for the 2014 election would be invalidated. The payments were designed to recognise the service of Councillors who had decided to retire from local government. Councillors who had received a severance payment were disqualified from standing as, or being, a Councillor.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

National Association of Councillors – Annual General Meeting and Conference

The Committee was advised that the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region) was holding its Annual General Meeting on Friday, 4th October, 2013 at the Clondeboye Lodge Hotel, Bangor. The meeting, at which new office bearers will be elected by the membership, was being addressed by Mark H. Durkan, the Minister for the Department of the Environment. It was intended that the Minister, in his address, would advise Members of the progress of Local Government Reorganisation and the next steps. The total cost per delegate attending would be approximately £56 and it was recommended that the Committee authorise the attendance at the Annual General Meeting of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council's representatives on the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region), and a representative of each of the Parties on the Council not represented by the aforementioned Members.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Local Authorities Members' Association – Autumn Seminar

The Democratic Services Manager reported that advance notification had been received in respect of the Local Authorities Members' Association (LAMA) Autumn Seminar in Ennistymon, County Clare which was taking place on 11th and 12th of October. The theme of the seminar was 'Local Authorities as Drivers of Economic Development'. The keynote speakers were still being finalised and details were not available at this stage. The event information had not been received by the Council at the time of the production of the report.

In accordance with Council policy, it was recommended that the Committee authorise the attendance at the Annual General Meeting of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council's representatives on the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region), the Democratic Services Manager (or their nominees) and a representative of each of the Parties on the Council not represented by the aforementioned Members.

Moved by Councillor Reynolds,
Seconded by Councillor Spence,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of attendance at the event to enable information in relation to the seminar programme to be received.

On a vote by show of hands six Members voted for the proposal and nine against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee adopted the recommendation in relation to attendance at the Seminar.

Freedom of the City for Van Morrison

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Council to confer on Van Morrison the Freedom of the City.

Live Streaming and Archiving of Council Proceedings on the internet

The Committee considered a report which provided details of the viewing figures for the live streaming and archiving of Council proceedings on the internet for the period from 3rd September, 2012 till 1st July 2013.

Noted.

Unauthorised Disclosure of Personal Information relating to Members

The Legal Services Manager provided the Members with an update in relation to the unauthorised disclosure of personal information relating to Members which had occurred on 21st February, 2012. He indicated that the Information Commissioner's Office had concluded its investigation and no further action would be taken against the Council. He undertook to submit a detailed report at a future meeting of the Committee.

Noted.

Finance/Value-for-Money

Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel

The Committee adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel held on 12th August.

Minutes of Meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel of 15th August.

Rates Setting 2014/2015

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

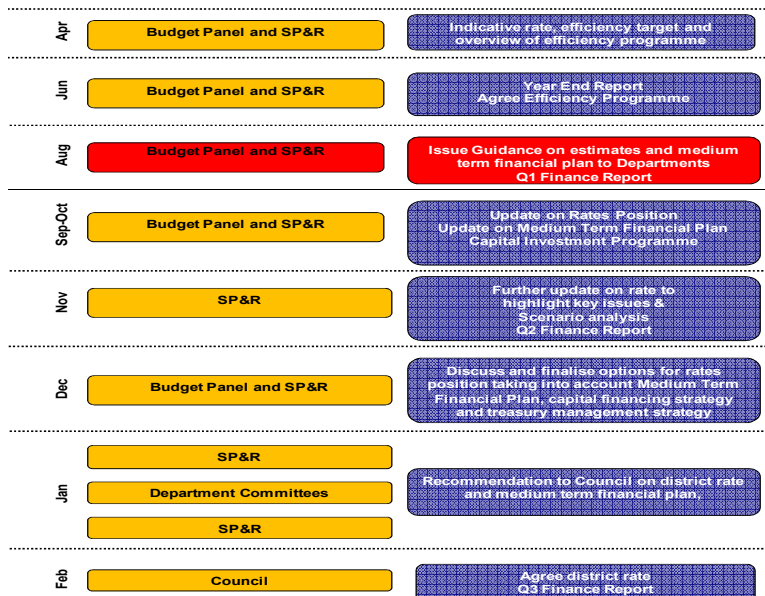
“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 This report provides an overview of the rate setting process for 2014/15 and the proposed high level guidance which will be issued to departments for the preparation of the 2014/15 departmental revenue estimates.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of the rate setting process and the reporting / decision stages for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Agreed rate setting process for 2014/15



2.2 Investment Programme Commitment

The investment programme commits the council to keeping any annual rate increase to the rate of inflation or below for the period up to 2014/15.

- 2.3 The current forecast rate for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for 2014/15 is 2.4% and therefore in order to meet the investment programme target, the increase in the District Rate for 2014/15 cannot exceed 2.4%.

2.4 External Pressures on Departmental Budgets

Superannuation: The NI Local Government Superannuation Pension Scheme (NILGOS) have indicated that the Employer Contribution Rate is likely to increase 20% to 21% for 2014/15. This will result in an uncontrollable cost increase for the council of £611k, representing a 0.47% increase in the District Rate.

- 2.5 *Employee Pay Rise:* In 2013/14 Local Government Employees received a pay increase of 1% which was the first pay rise in 4 years. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has decided to extend pay restraint into 2015-16 with a continued cap on public sector pay rises of 1%. A 1% pay rise in 2014/15 would equate to an uncontrollable cost for the council of £871k, representing a 0.67% increase in the District Rate for 2014/15. As in 2013/14, the pay rise element of the 2014/15 revenue estimates would be retained as a corporate budget and only transferred to departments budgets if a pay settlement is agreed.

- 2.6 *Employee Increments:* Staff who have not reached the final point of their salary scale, will be due an increment in 2014/15. The increments will mean an uncontrollable cost increase of £358k or a 0.28% increase in the District Rate for 2014/15.

- 2.7 *Energy Costs:* Energy costs are forecast to increase by 5% in 2014/15, with fuel costs for the Council's fleet estimated to increase by 4% in the same period. This will mean an increase in energy and fuel costs of £531k in 2014/15, representing an increase of 0.41% on the District Rate. Work will continue on the energy stream of the council's efficiency programme focusing on the management and procurement of energy for council assets, to reduce the impact of these cost increases.

- 2.8 *Income Risk:* Income from electricity generation at the North Foreshore is estimated to reduce by a further £300k during 2014/15, with a further £100k loss of income in other areas arising from the current economic environment. The reduction in income would total £400k and would represent a 0.31% increase on the district rate. Further work will be undertaken to

test the income assumptions at service level as part of the estimates setting process

- 2.9 The total uncontrollable cost increase is forecast to be £2.77m and is detailed in Table One below.
- 2.10 This does not include potential growth proposals or the general inflationary impact on supplies and services. It is proposed that departments are requested to absorb the inflationary impact on supplies and services and that business cases will be required for any growth proposals.

Table 1
Uncontrollable Departmental Cost Increases 2014/15
(Excluding CPI Increase)

Description	Estimated Cost Increase	Impact on District Rate
Superannuation	£611k	0.47%
Pay Rise	£871k	0.67%
Pay Increments	£358k	0.28%
Energy & Fuel	£531k	0.41%
Income Risk	£400k	0.31%
Total Uncontrollable Costs (Excluding CPI Increase)	£2,771k	2.13%

2.11 Efficiency Programme

The Council is committed to delivering £2m of efficiency savings for 2014/15 and these will support the delivery of a rates increase below the rate of inflation. A detailed report on the programme will be brought to the committee in September.

- 2.12 *Rate Base of the City*: The council receives 74% of its income from the District Rate and the sustainability of the rate base is therefore critical to the council's financial position and future spending plans. An analysis of the 2012/13 rates outturn has been undertaken. A detailed report on the potential impact of the rates performance for 2012/13 on the forecast rates position for 2014/15 will be brought to the committee in September.

2.13 Capital Expenditure Plans

Capital Programme: This is used to pay for enhancements to existing council assets or for the provision of new assets owned by the council. The capital programmed is financed through an annual budget and at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21 June 2013, it was agreed to increase this budget from 2014/15 to £13.37m through the transfer of £3.23m from the £6m annual Belfast Investment Fund budget. This transfer would finance the Olympia and Andersonstown Leisure Schemes without the requirement to increase the District Rate.

2.14 *Belfast Investment Fund:* This is used to finance investment package schemes for non council assets. The annual contribution to the Belfast Investment Fund for 2014/15 will be £2.77m and this will ensure that £20m of funding is available by 2015 in line with the Investment Programme commitment. There is therefore no requirement to increase the current level of contribution to the Belfast Investment Fund during 2014/15.

2.15 Local Investment Fund: This is used to fund neighbourhood capital projects for non-council assets. The £5m fund has been fully financed and there is therefore no requirement to make additional contributions through the District Rate during 2014/15.

2.16 Reserves

The council's current general reserves position is £13.3m and is therefore within the minimum reserve level of £10.1m agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. A separate report to the committee will request an allocation of £1.15m from reserves to finance the non-recurrent cost elements of the Leisure Transformation Programme. If this is agreed reserves will still be at an acceptable level and therefore there will be no requirement to increase the reserves through the District Rate in 2014/15.

3 Equality and Good Relations Implications

There are no equality and good relations implications associated with this report.

4 Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- 1. Note the contents of the report and that further updates on the development of the estimates, capital expenditure plans and the rate base position, will be provided to Members in line with the timetable provided at paragraph 2.1.**
- 2. Agree that departments are requested to absorb the inflationary impact on supplies and services and that business cases will be required for any growth proposals.**
- 3. Agree to consider reports on the efficiency programme and the rate base at the September meeting of the committee.”**

During the discussion in the matter, the Director of Finance and Resources reported that, subsequent to the report having been issued, he had received further information that the recalculated payment by the Council of the employers' contribution to the Local Government Pension Fund would increase the uncontrolled departmental costs for 2014/15 by an estimated £900,000.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Requests for Funding - Common Purpose Belfast

The Committee was advised that a request for financial assistance in the sum of £6,000 had been received from Common Purpose Belfast in connection with its 2013 Navigator Programme. The money would be used to offer three part-funded places on its Programme for emerging leaders from non-profit organisations in Belfast. Last year, the Council had funded participants from Positive Futures, Cancer Focus NI and Mindwise. The programme was designed to draw together local leaders, merging leaders and senior managers from all walks of life who could potentially play a role in shaping the future of Belfast. The Council had supported Common Purpose Belfast since its inception in 1996.

The Director of Finance and Resources reported that the application could be considered in the context of Section 37 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which provided the Council with discretionary powers to consider exceptional requests for financial assistance. He indicated that the application met the criteria for the funding in that regard.

Accordingly, it was

Resolved - that expenditure in the sum of £6,000 be approved for the aforementioned event under Section 37 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, 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 benefits so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made.

Request for Funding- Circuit of Ireland Rally 2014/16

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1. Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The Development Committee considered a request for funding of the above event at its meeting on 20 June 2013. The request was for funding of up to £25,000 per annum for the next three years (total £75,000).
- 1.2 The Development Committee was advised that there was no funding earmarked for this event in either the City Events Unit budget or the Specified Reserve for Special Events.
- 1.3 The Development Committee was requested to decline the funding for the event based on the fact that the City Events budget for the period, nor the Specified Reserve for Special Events, has any finance earmarked for such a project. The Development Committee decided to support the event and request that the matter be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to consider increasing the Development Department’s finances for events.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 As part of the rate setting process, cash limits for standing committees are approved, based on the detailed financial estimates prepared by departments.
- 2.2 Proposals for growth in departmental budgets are considered as part of the rate setting process, within the context of the Council’s overall financial position and affordability and impact on the District Rate.
- 2.3 Where the in-year budget monitoring process indicates a forecast under spend position, then the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee may consider approving the release of some of these resources to fund non-recurring initiatives, projects or to meet external funding requests.
- 2.4 In previous years this approach has been used to approve non-recurring funding for the NI Hospice, Area Intervention Pilots, Boxing Strategy, and Advice Centres. In November 2012, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also approved the allocation of an additional £1.96m of finance to the Specified Reserve for Special Events (such as Giro d’ Italia, and Tall Ships) to supplement the Development Department’s annual events budget and to align resources to

ensure that the burden on ratepayers is minimised for future years.

- 2.5 In considering requests for additional resources, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee must assess the affordability of such requests and be assured that these are of a non-recurring nature.
- 2.6 The Circuit of Ireland proposal is for recurrent funding of an event for a three year period and has not been earmarked in either the annual events budget, or specified events reserve for the Development Department. For these reasons it was recommended to the Development Committee that the funding request should be declined.
- 2.7 Given these factors and that the Quarter 1 departmental position of the Council is forecasting an under spend which is within 0.4% of the annual budget, it is recommended that the Committee decline the funding request and refer the matter back to the Development Committee for further consideration in the context its own budget or their revenue estimate business growth proposals for 2014/15.

3. Resource Implications

Financial

The request for funding of the event is up to £25,000 per annum for the period 2014-16 requiring a total commitment of £75,000. Funding for the event has not been earmarked in either the Development Department's events budget or the Specified Reserve for events.

4. Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 4.1 There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Committee decline the allocation of additional funding to the Development Department to fund this event and that the matter be referred back to the Development Committee.

6. Decision Tracking

The Director of Development will advise the Development Committee of the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee."

After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that the Council provide funding for the event but that, in the first instance, the matter be referred back to the Development Committee to allow it to examine its budgets to identify whether or not the necessary funding could be made available from that Committee. It was agreed also that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to identify how major and special events could be funded in the future.

Financial Reporting- Quarter 1 2013/14

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

1.1 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed on 18 June 2010 that:

- The Council would produce financial reporting packs for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and each Standing Committee on a quarterly basis
- The Budget and Transformation Panel would also receive monthly financial updates if there were any significant issues to report.

1.2 The reporting pack contains a summary dashboard of the financial indicators and an executive summary explaining the financial performance, a copy of which has been circulated. It also provides a more detailed explanation of each of the relevant indicators covering outturn for the quarter, payment of creditors, recovery of debt and procurement compliance.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Current and Forecast financial Position 2013/14

The financial position for Quarter 1 is a net departmental under-spend of £364k (1.2%). The forecast year end departmental position is an under-spend of £471k (0.4%).

2.2 The financial reporting pack contains more detail on the quarter 1 and forecast positions. It should be emphasised that it is very early in the financial year and therefore it is difficult to make an accurate forecast of the year end financial position. It should also be noted that the forecast position of an under spend of £471k, represents only 0.4% of the Council’s annual budget. For this reason and that the Council has already committed in year allocation amounts of £250k for the NI Hospice and £120k for the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Championships, it is recommended at this stage no further in year reallocations are made.

2.3 Capital Financing

The capital financing budget is £10.14m. This budget is forecast to break even and will be used to finance the capital programme and feasibility work to support the Investment Programme.

2.4 Rate Income

The initial forecast by LPS is that BCC would have a favourable outturn of £1m. BCC officers will be working closely with LPS to ensure that the in year forecast takes account of issues such as outstanding appeals, vacancy inspections and the impact on businesses going into administration. Given that this is a quarter 1 forecast by LPS and that this validation work will have to be undertaken by the Council, it is recommended that no decision regarding the allocation of the resources arising from the forecast positive settlement by LPS be taken at this stage. A detailed report on rating issues will be brought to the Committee in September.

2.5 Investment Programme

Committed expenditure approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the 3 year Capital Programme stands at £35.590m, leaving £39.410m of schemes within the 3 year programme at the uncommitted or emerging project stage.

2.6 Committed expenditure on LIF projects currently stands at £4.6m, leaving a balance of £400k in the local investment fund.

2.7 The amount of levered external funding for the Investment Programme which has been agreed in principal is £65.073m, with £19.053m of these funds confirmed through letters of offer.

2.8 Actual capital expenditure for the period was £2.057m, while non-recurring expenditure was £0.52m.

2.9 Other Financial Indicators

The Quarter 1 average for debt under 90 days old is 50.4% which is below the target of 60% however the overall debt reduced from £4.2m to £3.7m during the quarter.

2.10 The average number of creditors paid within 28 days for quarter 1 was 80.0%, which exceeded the target of 75%

3.0 Resource Implications

3.1 The financial position for Quarter 1 is a net departmental under-spend of £364k (1.2%). The forecast year end departmental position is an under-spend of £471k (0.4%).

4.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

There are no equality and good relations implications associated with the report.

5.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:-

- Note the quarter 1 financial report.
- Agree that no reallocations are considered for quarter 1.

7.0 Key to Abbreviations

LPS: Land and Property Service”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Publication of Employee Travel Costs

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided costs for employee travel for the financial year 2012/13 and agreed that, in line with previous years, the figures would be published on the Council’s website.

Human Resources

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

Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives

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

Noted.

Consultation Document on Sharing Parental Rights, Extending Flexibility at Work

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The Department for Employment and Learning has launched a public consultation exercise to seek views on whether it is appropriate (and if so to what extent) to implement in N Ireland a programme corresponding to one that is being taken forward in Great Britain by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, setting out a framework of new rights for working parents.
- 1.2 The Council has been asked by the Minister for Employment and Learning to respond to a number of questions as part of its consultation exercise on this. The consultation document and draft response to the consultation questions is attached at Appendix A.

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 In February 2013, the UK government introduced into Parliament the Children and Families Bill which included provisions that will make fundamental changes to the statutory leave entitlements, both paid and unpaid, that are available to working parents in Great Britain. The Minister for Employment and Learning has secured the agreement of the Executive to seek the views of local stakeholders on the merits of these proposals; the extent (if any) to which they should be implemented in N Ireland and whether or not alternative options may be appropriate.
- 2.2 The proposed new arrangements are designed to provide working parents with greater flexibility in determining how best to share the statutory pay and leave provisions associated with the birth or adoption of a child and sets out proposals to allow partners of either the mother or the primary adopter to become more involved in ante natal care or in the stages leading up to an adoption, where that is what both people want.
- 2.3 The second aspect of the consultation is a proposal to significantly broaden the existing right to request flexible working.
- 2.4 Appendix A provides a response to each of the questions contained in the consultation document. These proposals support much of what the Council is trying to achieve in terms of:
- the promotion of diversity and equal opportunities

- being a best practice employer of choice
- attracting and retaining talent
- work-life balance, health and wellbeing and employee satisfaction.

The overall proposed response from BCC to the proposals outlined in the consultation is therefore a positive one that welcomes suggested measures to facilitate the proper consideration and facilitation of requests for flexible working in a way that meets both council needs and employee needs.

The proposals to allow more sharing of parental rights are also welcomed in our proposed response, but some of the potential practical issues that employers may face around implementation and administration of the proposed provisions are highlighted with suggestions on how they might be dealt with. Essentially these are:

- the preference for shared leave plans to be agreed in advance where possible
- the need for sufficient notice periods, where feasible, for employers to accommodate any changes in leave plans
- the need for an effective administration link between relevant employers to ensure accuracy of employee declarations and prevent misuse.

3.0 Resource Implications

3.1 The estimated resource implications of the proposals outlined are included in the consultation document.

4.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

4.1 The Department of Employment and Learning has conducted an equality screening exercise and the consultation document contains a summary of the outcome of that work.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is asked to approve the draft response to the consultation on Sharing Parental Rights and Extending Flexibility at Work, attached at Appendix A.

Annex A: Question and Answer Booklet

Your details

Your name: Jill Minne

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation

Name of the organisation: Belfast City Council

Your position within the organisation: Head of Human Resources

Part I: Shared parental proposals – general

Having read the information contained within this paper and the associated documentation, please provide us with your opinions on the following questions.

Q1. *What are the arguments supporting the introduction/extension of the shared parental proposals to Northern Ireland?*

The proposals to share parental leave look likely to support much of what Belfast City Council is trying to achieve organisationally in terms of:

- the promotion of diversity and equal opportunities
- being a best practice employer of choice
- attracting and retaining talent
- work-life balance, health and wellbeing and employee satisfaction.

Many services will welcome the early return of some workers from maternity leave.

Q2. *What are the arguments against this course of action?*

- Potential disruption to services if an employee shares leave in an intermittent pattern (eg 1 week in, 1 week off);
- Additional administrative burden to line management and the Council's Payroll function in particular
- Knock-on effect on employees who are providing cover or are backfilling posts
- 6 weeks notice of changes to leave plans may not be sufficient where there are cover/backfilling arrangements in place – and there is lack of certainty about how long an employee will be on leave
- The proposed system is dependent upon an employee and his/her partner co-ordinating the administration of their leave through self-certification – there is however no proposed checking/assurance mechanism in place to ensure there is no abuse of the system.

Q3. *What alternative approaches should be considered?*

- A requirement for a fixed pattern of leave to be agreed at an early stage
- The need to provide both of the relevant employers with greater notice when the agreed pattern of shared leave needs to change
- An administrative link between the relevant employers to ensure accuracy of employee declarations and avoid unnecessary costs being incurred by both organisations

Part II: Administration of shared parental rights

Q1. *Please provide any evidence on any administrative difficulties that the different notice periods for paternity leave and pay currently cause employers.*

- There is potential difficulty around the ability to track the number of weeks taken to ensure the combined total does not exceed the statutory limit. If the two claimants are employed by two different employers it could be problematic ensuring that together the maximum leave entitlement is not exceeded

Q2. *Do you agree with the proposal to align the notice period for paternity leave and pay at the end of the 15th week before the expected week of child birth (or within 7 days of being matched with a child for adopters)?*

YES NO

Please explain.

- No objection to this proposal

Q3. *Do you think that a woman should have 4 or 6 weeks from birth to revoke her notice to end maternity leave and opt into the shared parental system where the notice has been given prior to birth?*

4 weeks

6 weeks

Please explain.

- As much notice as possible is better for the employing organisation, given the potential disruption and impact on service delivery/cover arrangements. It is accepted however that exceptional circumstances will arise and will need to be dealt with on an individual basis.

Q4. Do you agree on the level of information to be provided by an employee as part of the notification process?

If not, please explain why and what information you would like to be required.

- An administrative link between the relevant employers would be helpful to seek to ensure the system is not vulnerable to misuse. The introduction of any new provisions might present an opportunity to review and strengthen assurance mechanisms

Q5. Do you agree with the proposal to allow parents to notify their employer of their intentions as they require them?

Please explain.

- This section essentially requires employees to provide 8 weeks notice of any changes to their plans, which seems appropriate for an organisation like BCC. It could however be insufficient time for some employers to put cover in place.
- It might also result in delays to the processing of payment
- This section envisages a scenario where one employer can facilitate a particular arrangement but the other cannot, and maps out how this impacts on both people and their employers (withdrawing applications; submitting new applications etc); this emphasises the need for an assurance/ communication channel between the relevant employers to seek to ensure clarity in the process of applications for shared leave.

Q6. To allow employers to know their employees' definite leave plans at least 6 weeks before any leave starts, it is proposed to set the negotiation period at 2 weeks. Do you agree? Please explain.

- This seems sufficient for straight-forward cases. However, where the requested pattern cannot be facilitated, there may be a need for further dialogue to reach an agreement, which may take longer than 2 weeks. It may be helpful for this

section to include guidance that the negotiation period may be extended by mutual agreement.

Q7. Do you think that the cut-off point for parents taking shared parental leave should be: 52 weeks from start of maternity leave or 52 weeks from birth?

Please explain.

- 52 weeks from birth would give maximum flexibility to parents without having a significant impact on the Council as a large employer. This may not however be the view of smaller employers.

Q8. Is 10 KIT days per parent for shared parental leave the right number?

Please explain.

- 10 KITs is sufficient for BCC. Smaller employers may have a different view of this.

Q9. Which 'right to return to the same job' option (1 or 2) would you prefer be applied to shared parental leave?

Option 1 Right to return to the same job for employees continuous block of leave of 26 weeks or less or

Option 2 Right to return to the same for employees returning from aggregated leave of up to 26 weeks even if the leave is not taken as a single block.

Please explain.

- BCC could almost certainly facilitate option 2, even if the scheme established option 1 as a minimum standard.

Q10. In cases of fostering to adopt where the child is matched and placed with the prospective adoptive parents on the same day, how can realistic notification be given to employers of the need to take adoption leave and pay?

- The principles which apply in the case of premature birth/maternity leave & pay could be applied in this scenario. That is, the employee notifies the employer as soon as reasonably practicable. Where there is a good

reason, late notification can be accepted for several weeks after premature birth and we should be able to facilitate the same for short-notice adoption and fostering placements given the likely (low) volume of such cases.

Part III: Right to request flexible working

Q1. *Should the right to request flexible working be extended to all employees with an appropriate length of service, extended more narrowly to selected groups, or remain unchanged? Please explain.*

- BCC already extends the right to request flexible working to all employees.
- Regardless of length of service, grade etc, decisions regarding requests for flexible working are looked at on an individual basis based on all the circumstances of the case , i.e., the nature of the job in question, the nature of the request made and the needs of the business, with a view to reaching mutual agreement

Q2. *Is it appropriate to move towards a model imposing a duty on employers to deal with requests reasonably, supported by a Code of Practice and guidance rather than, as at present, requiring a statutory series of steps to deal with requests? How might this work?*

- A code of practice and guidance would be a welcome addition to t statutory provisions. It could place an emphasis on the need to be reasonable in considering these requests, as opposed to simply satisfying a statutory exercise. This would help organisations to communicate to managers the need to give detailed consideration to every request and to be creative in reaching a mutually acceptable solution with the employee.
- It would also be helpful if the guidance placed an emphasis on the need for the employee also to be flexible and to work collaboratively with his or her manager to agree a solution.

Part IV: General

Q1. *Having read the impact assessment, please detail any potential impacts that you believe require further consideration.*

- **Para 4.15 - It might be helpful to consider additional entitlement to time off for ante-natal appointments for partners in circumstances where complications in pregnancy are identified in the ante-natal period.**

Q2. Are particular impacts likely to be experienced by small employers and, if so, what steps can be taken to minimise them?

Q3. Please provide any other comments that might aid the consultation process as a whole.

- **It is noted that any decision on the attendance of others at ante natal appointments should rest with the mother. (para 3.14) . Perhaps this principle be applied across all key areas of the provision to avoid instances where mothers' or key adopters' wishes, regarding the involvement of fathers or partners, change?"**

The Committee approved the draft response.

The Committee agreed that items 5(c) Retirement of Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive and 5(d) Local Government Reform – Appointment of Chief Executive Posts be considered at the end of the meeting.

Asset Management

Illuminate Project - "Light it up Gold" Campaign

The Committee was reminded that the governance arrangements for the Illuminate Project, which it had approved in February, 2013, limited access to the new ILLUMINATE LED lighting facilities to:

- (a) the charities nominated by our civic office-bearers;
- (b) events organised or supported by the council; and
- (c) an agreed schedule of additional days.

Any request which did not fall into those categories required the approval of the Committee.

The Director of Property and Projects reported that a request had been received recently from the 'Light it up Gold' campaign for the use of the new LED lighting system at City Hall on Saturday 7th September, 2013 to highlight issues around children's cancer by illuminating the building in a gold colour. The group was comprised of parents of children affected by a variety of cancers and was part of a wider campaign with a presence in North America and Europe. At the time of submitting the report, the group had indicated that commitments to have public buildings lit up in gold had already

been received from a number of well-known international landmarks, including the Niagara Falls, The Prudential Tower in Boston and the CN Tower in Toronto.

In terms of more local participation, commitments had also been given by a number of prominent locations in the city of Dublin, including for example the Mansion House, Dublin Conference Centre, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Greystones Harbour, The G Hotel and Eyre Square Fountain.

The facilities available at the City Hall allowed lighting scenes to be created quite easily and without involving additional cost or significant work. The Director pointed out the request was for a single occurrence only and that the date would not be added to the existing schedule of additional days.

The Committee approved the use of the LED lighting system at City Hall for the purposes of marking the 'Light it up Gold' campaign on 7th September, 2013 only.

Purchase of Land at Hannahstown Hill/ Upper Springfield Road

The Director of Property and Projects reported that an opportunity to acquire approximately 30 acres of land in the west of Belfast extending between Hannahstown Hill and the Upper Springfield Road had arisen. The land directly adjoined an existing smaller Council landholding of approximately 6 acres which was accessible from Hannahstown Hill.

The Committee granted approval to enter into negotiations to acquire the aforementioned lands.

Gasworks Site Northern Fringe

The Committee was reminded that the Council has agreed previously a Masterplan for the Gasworks Northern Fringe which outlined proposals for progressing development on a site by site basis. Within the context of the Masterplan, the Council had agreed specifically to work with Inislyn Ltd - developer of the Radisson Blu hotel and the Lighthouse Building - in respect of developing two areas known as sites C and D of the Northern Fringe.

Subsequent detailed discussions with Inislyn had been based on an extension to the existing hotel, the development of a multi-storey car park and a further office site.

The Committee granted approval to progress negotiations with Inislyn Lt based on the Heads of Terms which had been outlined by the Director of Property and Projects and to enter thereafter into an Agreement for a lease in respect of Sites C and D of the Gasworks North Fringe.

Disposal of Land at McClure Street

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Following previous Committee decisions to market for sale, free of restrictions, lands at McClure Street the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting of 19th August 2011 approved appointment of an estate agent to progress a disposal at an asking price in the region of £450,000 with a further report to be brought back for approval of terms of any proposed disposal.
- 1.2 The site was marketed (for sale board, advertised in local papers, targeted mail shot of brochure) from October 2011. Despite an extensive campaign only one bid was eventually received in March 2012 from Apex Housing Association at a figure substantially below the guide price quoted.
- 1.3 In addition to the depressed state of the property market the development opportunities for this site remain very limited. Despite having previously received lucrative bids to purchase in the past these offers were predicated on receipt of planning for general housing. Notwithstanding these offers Planning Service advice was that these plans would not be granted permission. A further planning assessment for the site confirmed current planning policy would preclude such general housing development.
- 1.4 In keeping with dBMAP and current planning policy guidelines the Apex proposal is to develop social housing units that addresses a requirement for any development to pass an exceptions planning test for this designated open space and to deliver “substantial community benefits”
- 1.5 With the failure to secure any other interest in the site officers met with representatives from Apex in an attempt to find a way forward that would secure an enhanced disposal price in the absence of any competitive bidding process. This resulted in agreement to request Land & Property Services to undertake a valuation based on the Council’s planning assessment for the site.
- 1.6 Land & Property Services have provided a valuation of £240,000 reflecting social housing development and on this basis Apex have agreed to progress the purchase of this site, subject to Committee approval and planning.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Despite exhaustive efforts made to attract bids for this site the only bid secured was from Apex Housing Association at

£150,000 for the development of 16 social housing units. A combination of current planning designation (open space) which requires any development proposals to deliver “substantial community benefits” and the continuing effects of the economic down turn which has hit the property market in Northern Ireland particularly hard has impacted on the market value of this site.

- 2.2 Current dBMAP designation as “open space” and development constraints of PPS8 very much restrict the development potential of the site and hence the pool of potential bidders. Having been marketed for over a year officers initiated a meeting with Apex representatives to discuss a way forward that would secure the best price for the site and deliver another social housing project on former Council owned land. Apex agreed to the proposal that Land & Property Services would provide a valuation of the site as the basis on which to progress a purchase.**
- 2.3 In addition to the negative property market and planning factors, the narrow linear shape of the site presents its own development challenge. Over and above these recognised limitations Apex also claimed development potential was further eroded with development abnormalities totalling £267,000, proximity to a railway cutting and the presence of twin NI Water mains in McClure Street. On this basis Apex estimated only 16 social housing units could be developed on the site.**
- 2.4 In order to address the issues raised in maximising a return from this disposal further planning advice was sought to counter the claims made by Apex and to provide a scheme proposal that would achieve full potential from development of the site with 22 social housing units. This planning advice was provided to Land & Property Services and formed the basis of reaching their assessment of £240,000.**
- 2.5 Apex have now agreed to make an offer to purchase on the basis of the assessment provided by Land & Property Services but still have reservations in respect of the housing density they can secure at planning. To this end they have sought to subsequently reduce the premium agreed for any housing units for which they fail to achieve planning consent. The Council will retain the right to approve the scheme that Apex submits to Planning Service in the first instance in order to ensure Apex seeks to maximise the number of units on the site and hence the full premium secured.**

- 2.6 The land is currently a long narrow wedge of informal open space that is poorly used and attracts fly tipping with ongoing maintenance issues. Should this disposal proceed Council retain and manage a further area of open space on McClure Street (directly opposite the site being sold) together with McClure Street playground as Council community facilities retained in the vicinity.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

Capital receipts can be utilised in furtherance of the Belfast Investment Fund, capital projects and other corporate priorities.

Ongoing annual costs associated with the maintenance of this open space will cease upon completion of the sale.

3.2 Human Resources

Staff resources in Estates Management Unit and Legal Services required to conclude the disposal.

3.3 Asset and Other Implications

Disposal and development of this land with resultant redeployment of the capital receipts towards other Council priorities should represent a better use of resources.

Subject to planning it is likely that the Apex proposals for the site will provide between 16-22 social housing units.

Provision of additional social housing to address a need identified by NIHE with associated regenerative benefits for the general area.

4 Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 4.1 There are no equality implications at this stage.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are requested to approve the disposal of this land as set out above and subject to terms agreed by the Estates Manager and Legal Services.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Public Path Creation Agreement at Ligoniel

The Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 13th June, had agreed to enter into a 10 year Public Path Creation Agreement with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to utilise an existing path located on NIW land at Ligoniel.

On completion of the Agreement the Council would become responsible for the maintenance of the path. New access provision at either end of the path (either stiles and/or way marking) was being externally funded by the Belfast Hills Partnership Trust. That would provide access to the NIW land from Ligoniel Park through to the Crumlin Road, approximately 1 kilometre above the Horseshoe Bend.

The Committee authorised the Public Path Creation Agreement for the lands as outlined.

North Foreshore Disposal: Plot 2 Cleantech Renewable Energy

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Council has previously agreed that the development of the North Foreshore should comprise an Environmental Resource Park to create an innovative "Cleantech Environmental Technology Business Cluster" for Belfast which would encourage investment and job creation. The development of a renewable energy hub within the park will also demonstrate the Council's leadership in building the City's resilience and promoting renewable energy in an era of growing energy insecurity, increasing energy cost and fuel poverty.**
- 1.2 The development of the North Foreshore Environmental Resource Park is included in the Council's Investment Programme 2012 – 2015. Members will be aware that the Council has submitted a £8 million European Regional Development Fund Application to develop the infrastructure for this environmental resource park. Invest NI and DETI are currently assessing the application, and the Council expects a decision at the end of 2013.**
- 1.3 The Council has already commenced the regeneration of the North Foreshore with the completion of a waste transfer station, substation, and a landfill gas electricity generation power plant. The electricity substation currently generates**

3mw of renewable electricity which is exported to the local grid network and is sufficient to power up to 3,500 homes. The substation does, however have sufficient spare export capacity of 7 mw to the local grid network, which provides the opportunity to encourage the further development of renewable energy facilities to create a sustainable energy hub at the North Foreshore

- 1.4 Within the area reserved for the environmental business park, the SP&R Committee, on 25 January 2013, approved the release of a Marketing Prospectus for the disposal of a 3 acre site for a Cleantech Biogas renewable energy facility

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 The Council publicly advertised the Cleantech Renewable Energy development opportunity in the local paper, Council website and in the EU Journal in March 2013. The closing date for development bids for the site was 30 May 2013. Developers were required to provide a detailed submission setting out details of their financial bid for the site, development proposals, proposed programme, funding sources, project team and experience.
- 2.2 An Evaluation Panel was established comprising of representatives from Estates, Legal Services and Corporate Services, to undertake the assessment of any Development Submissions received prior to the closing date. The Evaluation Panel used the following assessment criteria outlined in the Marketing Prospectus:
 - I. Financial offer for the heat and power easement fees.
 - II. Company background, financial viability of the project and the financial capability of the operator to fund, deliver, operate and possibly expand the facility.
 - III. Experience of the Developer and project Development Team to deliver and operate similar cleantech biogas renewable energy facilities.
 - IV. Quality of the design proposal to contribute to enhancing the image of the “Cleantech Environmental Technology Business Sector” and the socio economic benefits.
 - V. Delivery of the project within a reasonable timescale.
- 2.3 The Evaluation Panel are of the view that a submission received from the company Tamar Energy Ltd meets the

criteria as set out in the Development Brief in terms of funding and delivering a commercially robust cleantech biogas renewable energy project.

- 2.4 Tamar Energy Ltd are proposing to develop an Anaerobic Digester facility that would process commercial organic food waste to produce biogas to power up to 3 Mw of renewable electricity and heat. This could be sufficient to power up to 3,500 homes. It will also contribute towards the 40% renewable energy target established by the NI Executive. Anaerobic Digestion (AD) is a cleantech technology that is a modern and clean facility that processes organic waste in the absence of oxygen, producing a biogas that can be used to generate electricity and heat. The AD operation takes place in an enclosed building under slight negative pressure and sealed containers to contain the odour. Tamar Energy Ltd has indicated that they will invest £12 million from private equity investors, to develop the AD Facility.
- 2.5 Tamar Energy Ltd is proposing to create a number of permanent full time jobs, and have indicated they are committed to make every effort to recruit locally for the positions. There will also be additional construction jobs created by the project.
- 2.6 The NI Executive is promoting the development of AD facilities to generate renewable energy to reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels and to improve our security of energy supply. The Executive has imposed targets that 40% of our energy production is to come from renewable sources by 2020. Currently, NI is producing c12% of its energy from renewable sources. It is worth highlighting that in 2009 the Council's landfill gas electricity generation power plant at the North Foreshore was producing 5mw which accounted for 1% of the 12% renewable target established by the Executive for 2012.
- 2.7 In addition, the NI Executive has also established targets to divert waste away from landfill and has established a recycling target of 60% by 2020. The Tamar Energy Ltd AD proposal will help to divert organic food waste away from landfill and contribute towards the 60% recycling target.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

The Council will receive a financial return for the site based on a ground rental (reviewable every 5 years) and a further return based on the amount of electricity generated from the facility

and on the amount of any heat exported from the facility. The return from electricity and heat is based on an agreed (unconditional) price per mw hour. The total return will be dependent upon the amount of electricity and heat generated but setting aside any potential return from the export of heat (which is less certain given that there are currently no end users on this site), the estimated return to the Council is circa £154,000 per annum.

In order to enable development and comply with planning and NIEA requirements and for the protection of human health, the site will however require capping works (including an active gas abstraction system) to be undertaken. The cost of the capping work for this 3 acre site is approximately £735,000, which will require to be met from the Capital Programme. A further report is being brought to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in September in relation to the Capital Programme and it will include further details on this. It is worth noting however that in the absence of development the Council may still have to provide a basic capping system.

Taking into account the proposed financial return from the site, the payback period for this capital outlay is approximately 4.8 years. This represents a very good return on investment particularly given that a 25 year lease is proposed with the rent reviewable on a regular basis. In addition, the development of this facility should act as an important anchor tenant and encourage other developers in the cleantech and renewable sectors to locate at the North Foreshore.

The proposed investment by Tamar Energy Ltd is £12 million. In addition to job creation for the City, this facility will also add to the City's rate base.

3.2 Assets

The development of this site represents an important regeneration opportunity for Belfast and has the potential to create significant economic, social and environmental benefits.

The development of this facility is important in firmly positioning the North Foreshore Environmental Resource Park and acting as an anchor tenant to encourage further development from this renewable energy and cleantech sector.

3.3 Human Resources

Staff resource, primarily from Property & Projects and Legal Services.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

4.1 None at this time

5 Recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that Members give approval to grant Tamar Energy Ltd preferred developer status and to enter into negotiations to complete a Site Options Agreement and Agreement to Lease for the disposal (by way of lease) of a site at the North Foreshore, as detailed above, and subject to detailed terms to be agreed by the Estates Manager and Legal Services, and also subject to the further report to be brought to SP&R Committee in September on the Capital Programme.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed that the North Foreshore Working Group receive a presentation from the preferred developer in relation to the proposals for the site.

Good Relations and Equality

(Mr. David Robinson, Senior Good Relation Officer, attended in connection with these items.)

Minutes of Meeting of Good Relations Partnership

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership of 12th August.

Together: Building a United Community and other Strategic Government Programmes

(The Chairman, Alderman Robinson, left the Chair whilst this item was under discussion.)

The Deputy Chairman, Councillor Maskey, in the Chair.

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“ Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware that the First and Deputy First Ministers jointly launched the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy at the end of May. The Executive Summary of that document was circulated at the meeting of

the Good Relations Partnership on 10 June and a more detailed report was considered at the Partnership's meeting on 12 August (see minutes of that meeting for full report).

The strategy represents a key building block in the implementation of the *Programme for Government 2011-2015* and provides the framework for action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.

It reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and places responsibilities on all government departments, requiring them to work together to ensure that the required outcomes are delivered on the ground.

The new strategy will have major implications for all public bodies in NI and, in particular, for local government since councils will have a key role in its delivery.

Priority Areas

The strategy identifies four key priority areas: children and young people; our shared community; our safe community; and our cultural expression.

Implementation

The strategy envisages a Panel made up of NI Ministers, plus senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies and community partners, supported by broadly based thematic sub-groups who will develop action plans with associated aims, targets, milestones and resources etc.

Key Issues - Implications for future work and opportunities for strategic alignment

Implementation of Together Building a United Community

The Good Relations Partnership welcomed this overarching strategy as a significant step forward by the NI Executive in tackling our community divisions and acknowledged the importance of a central coherent strategic approach, led at the most senior political level, to be delivered through effective and established structures at local level.

The strategy underlines the cross-cutting nature of the work required, stressing the need for joint working and inter-agency collaboration and has implications for the Council as a whole.

The programmes to be delivered, of particular interest to the Council, include:

- developing summer schools/camps for young people with a focus on sport
- ensuring that our approach to youth intervention becomes a year round programme
- developing cross-community programmes focusing on reconciliation through sport
- encouraging the use of the arts as a means of improving good relations
- continuing our work round interfaces, aiming to remove barriers and support local communities, through training and employment where possible
- building closer links between community safety and good relations.

The Council will not only be responsible for direct delivery of programmes on the ground but also for supporting local community and voluntary groups, through various Council Departments and a range of funding streams.

The Council is already actively supporting many of the types of initiatives outlined in the document and has ensured that equality and good relations are key principles underpinning our Investment Programme.

Preparing for community planning and links to other strategies

A number of proposals in the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy and its focus on local delivery and improving local outcomes mean that it has great synergy with opportunities presented by local government reform and in particular by the introduction of community planning powers. As Members will be aware, community planning will be a new power given to Councils which will provide a statutory basis for joint working between agencies towards common goals. The strategy also has significant commonality with the Investment Programme and its core principles of good relations and equality, balanced investment and partnership and integration.

In this respect *Together: Building a United Community* is one of a number of regional strategies/programmes, including the *Delivering Social Change Framework* and the *Social Investment Fund*, which provide ideal opportunities for closer working between the Council, government departments and communities in order to deliver improved quality of life across Belfast. There is a real opportunity to reinforce and

consolidate strategic programmes currently being driven by Members at a local level such as the implementation of the Investment Programme and leisure transformation.

The six signature projects identified by OFM/DFM under the *Delivering Social Change Framework* are intended to tackle matters such as improving skills, support for families and pathways to employment for young people and echo many of the objectives set by Members as part of the Investment Programme. Members have already highlighted the need to link projects within the *Social Investment Fund* and those within the Investment Programme in order to reinforce and maximise the benefit of both programmes for communities across the city.

As the NI Executive moves towards the development of a new *Programme for Government*, it will become even more important to align strategies and plans at both central and local government levels. It will also be important to demonstrate both the importance of Belfast to delivering regional goals and the practical determination of Belfast City Council to play a key role in delivering these strategies at a local level.

Engagement with OFM/DFM

Given the number of potential linkages between Council's plans and developments at a regional level, appropriate engagement at a political and officer level is crucial to ensure that key priorities are delivered and benefits for local communities maximised. At this formative stage, it is particularly important that the Council should be closely involved in the planning and preparation of any detailed programmes and action plans arising from the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy.

It is therefore recommended that the Committee writes to OFM/DFM to request a meeting between the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the Chairman of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the Party Group Leaders within Council in order to discuss how the Council and OFM/DFM can work together on programmes aimed at improving good relations and addressing social/economic problems. In particular the discussion should focus on:

- how the Council can assist the NI Executive and the government departments deliver, in a more integrated way, the priorities set out within *Together: Building a United Community*;

- how we can contribute to the *Delivering Social Change Framework*;
- how we can take a more joined up approach to delivering *Social Investment Fund* projects;
- the key strategic investment priorities for the city, in the context of community planning and the development of an economic strategy for Belfast.

It is also recommended that Council officers engage with OFM/DFM officials in order to support this political engagement and that the Chief Executive seeks a meeting to take forward work on options for the delivery of these strategic programmes at a local level.

Resource Implications

None at this stage.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

Expected to be positive. The *Together: Building a United Community Strategy* has been equality screened by OFM/DFM and since its intent is clearly intended to be positive it has been screened out.

Recommendations/Decision required

It is recommended that the Chairman of the Committee writes to OFM/DFM to request a meeting between the Ministers, the Chairman of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the Party Group Leaders to explore opportunities for more joined up working.

It is also recommended that meetings are held at officer level between OFM/DFM and Council in order to prepare options and recommendations for consideration by Members.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations, subject to the letter to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister being signed by the Deputy Chairman.

The Chairman, Alderman Robinson, in the Chair.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Framework for Student Housing in the City

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

The Belfast Learning City context

- 1.1 The draft Belfast City Masterplan Review highlights development of the Learning City as a key theme, aimed at harnessing the value of the higher education institutions across the city to maximise their impact on the economy, vibrancy and diversity of the city and the region.
- 1.2 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are anchor institutions and contribute significantly to the economic, social and environmental prosperity of the city, as well as providing a knowledge hub in the city.
- 1.3 Research has shown that students studying and living within cities make a significant contribution to local and regional economies. Belfast currently has 5 Higher Education Institutions across the city and by 2018 will have 2 major University campuses close to the city centre. There is also a growing international student market which presents a significant opportunity for Belfast in terms of international marketing, tourism and knowledge research.
- 1.4 Attracting students to study and live in the city not only requires excellent education providers, high quality campuses and a wide choice of quality courses, but also the right city infrastructure including IT connections, transport and housing. Student housing of whatever nature needs to be attractive, high quality, safe, secure, accessible and affordable. It needs to be well planned and appropriately managed to ensure that there is positive integration with existing communities.
- 1.5 The *‘Belfast: A Learning City - Strategic Study of the Holyland and wider university area’* report was presented to the Council on 2nd April 2012 and outlined a number of recommendations in relation to student housing, to make Belfast a learning city and destination of choice for students. Two of the recommendations were:
 - a) Development of a coherent city wide strategy for student housing promoting choice and fit-for purpose accommodation; and
 - b) Identifying locations, innovative arrangements and measures to attract alternative funding for housing students in the city.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1** The Council has been leading a joint Inter agency team on the development of a student housing strategy involving DOE Planning, DSD, NIHE and SIB, DEL, DRD and the main HEIs. Specific areas of work have included:
- **Assessing the demand and market for student accommodation in the city;**
 - **Investigating Financial Models for purpose built accommodation; Considering suitable locations and factors to support student housing;**
 - **Defining the ‘Learning City’ concept so it can be effectively marketed.**
- 2.2** Belfast is different to most other large university cities in that the proportion of available managed purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) is considerably lower than elsewhere in the UK. Local students also tend to live with others from their home towns and stay in their student accommodation during weekdays only. Also, whilst there are lower numbers of international students, the HEIs are keen to attract new students and grow their existing base and there is a DEL target to increase the numbers over the next few years. This means Belfast needs a fairly unique solution.
- 2.3** A ‘Discussion document’ has now been produced (provided in Appendix 1) which presents proposals to address student housing requirements in the city, in the context of:
- **Developing Belfast as a Learning City;**
 - **Current market and demand information for student accommodation;**
 - **The current policy context**
 - **Case studies of other large university cities.**
 - **Proposed planning criteria for Purpose Built Student accommodation (PBSA).**
- 2.4** The planning criteria proposed in the document could form the basis for a future revised planning policy for PBSA (HMO Subject Plan, Policy HMO7) after 2015, following transfer of planning powers under Local Government Reform. The draft criteria are:
- i. Proximity: the development is within 15 minutes walking distance of a university/college campus or on a high frequency public transport route.*

- ii. Design: the nature and scale of the development is appropriate to its context, the design and layout of the development is of high quality and all units are self-contained (i.e. having a bathroom, w.c. and kitchen available for use by the occupants).*
- iii. Management: an appropriate Management Plan is in place to minimise potential negative impacts from occupants and the development on surrounding properties and neighbourhoods and to create a positive and safe living environment for students.*
- iv. Impact: the proposed development, when considered with existing and approved student accommodation development, would not result in an unacceptable impact upon surrounding residential amenity.*
- v. Need: the development meets an identified need for the type of accommodation proposed.*

2.5 The Planning Service has also confirmed that, once the Council has endorsed its support for these criteria, they will consider them as material in their planning considerations.

2.6 The document also advocates a number of other relevant policy-legislative and potentially financial interventions including improved HMO regulation, and an accreditation scheme for student accommodation together with actions to facilitate a wider range of provision of managed purpose built student accommodation within Belfast. These are:

- Working with DSD on their ongoing regeneration work, particularly in areas around the HEIs;
- Further work on developing a revised planning policy for PBSA and improved pre-application discussion guidance/processes for planning applications (DoE), and to progress with legislative proposals following the fundamental review of HMO regulation in Northern Ireland (DSD);
- Further work on understanding financial viability and, if necessary, exploring options for facilitating private sector or partnership delivery of PBSA schemes (BCC together with SIB, DSD, DFP).

2.7 The next steps are to:

- Undertake a managed consultation / engagement process, including structured interviews with key stakeholders and groups representing residents, students and landlords during September 2013. The document will also be published on the Council website for anyone to make comment. On completion of the consultation exercise the responses will be considered in

development of the student housing strategy going forward and a final report will be produced;

- Continue to work with key partners, including SIB, to explore the feasibility of options for facilitation of purpose built student accommodation;
- Develop a Business Case in conjunction with SIB to be submitted to DFP to assess whether there is scope for public sector financial support for delivering the strategy.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 Costs associated with the document/strategy have been allowed for within the revenue estimates.

4 Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 4.1 The Good Relations and Diversity Officer has been consulted and has advised that equality screening of the Discussion Document is not required at this stage. Following the outcome of the stakeholder consultation, future strategy proposals will be equality screened in line with corporate equality policy as they progress in more detail.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 The Committee is requested to:

- Agree to issue the Student Housing Discussion document (appendix 1) as a consultative draft and commence an engagement exercise with key stakeholders;
- Support the proposed planning criteria for PBSA schemes in consideration of future PBSA proposals; and
- Agree that that work should continue with key partners, including SIB, to explore the feasibility of options for facilitation of purpose built student accommodation, including the development of a Business Case.

6 Key to Abbreviations

PBSA – Purpose Built Student Accommodation
SIB – Strategic Investment Board
DSD – Department of Social Development
HEI – Higher Education Institution
DEL- Department for Employment and Learning
DFP – department of Finance and Personnel

8 Documents Attached

Appendix I – Draft discussion document on student housing and purpose built student accommodation

Appendix 1

**DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON STUDENT HOUSING AND PURPOSE
BUILT STUDENT ACCOMMODATION**

FOREWORD

I am pleased to present this discussion document on student housing and purpose built student accommodation on behalf of Belfast City Council and its partners on the Student Housing Joint Team¹. It follows on from the March 2012 report on *'Belfast: A Learning City - Holyland and Wider University Area Strategic Study – Independent Consultant's Report'*².

Research has shown that students studying and living within cities make a significant contribution to local and regional economies. Belfast currently has 5 Higher Education Institutions across the city and by 2018 will have 2 major University campuses close to the city centre. There is also a growing international student market which presents a significant opportunity for Belfast.

The recently published consultation draft of the Belfast City Masterplan Review highlights development of the Learning City as a key theme aimed at harnessing the value of the higher education institutions across the city to maximise their impact on the economy, vibrancy and diversity of the city and region.

¹ *Belfast City Council, Department for Social Development, Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Strategic Investment Board.*

² *In March 2012, Belfast City Council and its partners published the 'Belfast: A Learning City – Holyland and Wider University Area Strategic Study – Independent Consultant's Report' which outlines a range of recommendations to make Belfast a destination of choice for students and to restore the functional integrity of the Holyland. This report highlighted the need for Belfast to promote itself as a 'Learning City' to maximise the economic and regenerative benefits that this can bring to the city. This discussion document takes the aspect of student housing a stage further. The work in the Wider University Area is being considered separately.*

Attracting students to study and live in the city not only requires excellent education providers, high quality campuses and a wide choice of quality courses but also the right city infrastructure including IT connections, transport and housing. Student housing of whatever nature needs to be attractive, high quality, safe, secure, accessible and affordable. In addition, learning from experiences of areas such as the Holyland, student housing provision needs to be planned and appropriately managed to ensure that there is a more positive integration with any existing communities.

The Holyland and Wider University Area Strategic Study report highlighted that Belfast is different to most other large university cities in that the proportion of available managed purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) is considerably lower than elsewhere in the UK. Local students also tend to live with others from their home towns and stay in their student accommodation during weekdays only. There are also lower numbers of international students, however, there is a target set to increase this figure over the next few years. This means we need a fairly unique solution.

This document seeks to advocate a vision and direction for student housing and PBSA in Belfast and is a key stage in developing a strategy for student housing in Belfast.

The document has been jointly prepared in partnership with the relevant government departments and agencies together with input from Higher Education Institutions. We welcome your views and comments on the proposals it contains to help inform the future of student housing provision in the city.

As chairman of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee I wish to thank all the partners and stakeholders who have assisted in this work to date and to thank you in advance for any contribution you wish to make in response.

Alderman Gavin Robinson
(Chair of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee)
September 2013

CONTEXT FOR DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

1. This Discussion Document on student housing and purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) has been prepared in the context of:

- the outstanding opportunity to enhance Belfast's role as a Learning City.

- the expressed desire of the city's higher educational institutions to increase international student numbers who traditionally prefer PBSA.
 - the need to facilitate the development of PBSA in Belfast which has a lower level of PBSA than most other major university cities in the UK.
 - the proposed development of the University of Ulster campus in Belfast's Northside area and the development of the Belfast Metropolitan College's Campus in the Titanic Quarter.
 - the recommendations of the Strategic Study of the Holyland and the Wider University Area which noted the need to make Belfast a destination of choice for students through the provision of student housing and to assist in restoring the functional integrity of the Holyland.
 - the need to address issues of potential concentration of ad hoc student housing within local neighbourhoods whilst acknowledging the important role of the private rented sector in the provision of high quality student accommodation.
 - the fact that responsibilities for the student housing sector are fragmented and disjointed with no single organisation having responsibility for student housing and the development of policy or strategy.
2. The Document has been prepared by Belfast City Council on behalf of the Student Housing Joint Team which was led by Belfast City Council and comprised DoE Planning, Department for Social Development, Strategic Investment Board and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
3. To date, the work of the Joint Team (supported by a wider working group incorporating the Department for Employment and Learning, Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster) has focused on assessing the market and demand for PBSA, investigating financial models and developing a range of planning criteria that could be considered as requirements for PBSA. It is proposed that the latter will provide a basis for development of future planning policy for PBSA following the transfer of local planning powers to the City Council in 2015. In the interim, Belfast City Council and other Joint Team members will, following stakeholder consultation, utilise the criteria as they engage with the statutory planning process.

THE BELFAST LEARNING CITY CONCEPT

4. The publication '*Belfast: The Masterplan*' produced by the City Council is currently under review and in May 2013 a

'Consultation on Emerging Findings' was published, identifying the Learning City as one of its key themes. Under this theme, Belfast's higher education institutions are recognised as important city assets which have a considerable impact upon the city and regional economy. The strategic objectives, identified in the emerging findings, are to harness the economic power of the institutions to ensure that Belfast maximises the benefits from having a number of top learning establishments close to the city centre.

5. Higher education is critical to the overall prosperity and growth of the Northern Ireland economy as the sector³:
 - generates over £1bn annually in local economic activity;
 - generates over 6,500 jobs directly and levers the same number again in the labour market;
 - contributes significantly to the skills base, through highly qualified graduates, a factor which plays a crucial role in attracting inward investment;
 - has supported £100m's of new investment and 1,000's of high value new jobs through knowledge transfer and innovative initiatives, including the highly successful NI Science Park; and
 - attracts research funding from external sources which doubles the public investment in research activity in the two universities.

6. With five higher educational campuses in the city there is a prospect of being able to pilot innovative arrangements for city centre living and the development of services, facilities, amenities, cultural infrastructure and creative enterprises that will strengthen the city centre. The city centre has traditionally been viewed as a shared, safe space and the creation of safe spaces which support student life and the integration of students in the city and community will be an important feature of a Belfast as a Learning City.

STUDENT POPULATION

7. In 2011/12 the student population in Greater Belfast was 43,385 with approximately half of all students living at home. Most of the remainder lived in the private rented accommodation (much of which is HMO accommodation) and just fewer than 4,000 live in managed accommodation.

³ Source: Report to Department for Employment and Learning Committee, Queen's University of Belfast, March 2011.

The provision of PBSA in Belfast is approximately 50% the average rate of provision in the UK.

8. There are uncertainties in trying to make student population projections due to a range of factors including changing demographics, the impact of tuition fees, competition from other universities, the growing global market for international students and the associated increased demand from international students for university places across the UK.
9. The following table provides a breakdown of higher education student numbers by institution in Belfast for 2010/11 and updated figures for 2011/12. Queen's University, with 22,895 students, has the highest number of students in Belfast followed by University of Ulster (Belfast and Jordanstown campuses) with 15,029 students.

	Total Higher Education		Total Post Graduate		Total Undergraduate*	
	2010/11	2011/12	2010/11	2011/12	2010/11	2011/12
QUB	22,706	22,985	5,497	5,120	17,209	17,865
St Mary's	879	1,020	20	145	859	875
Stranmillis	1,163	1,340	132	145	1,031	1,195
UU: Belfast & J'Town	15,771	15,029	1,340	3,201	12,660	11,828
BMC	4,033	3,011	-	-	4,033	3,011
Total	44,552	43,385	6,989	8,611	35,792	34,774

** Includes full and part-time undergraduates*

10. Full-time undergraduates form a core market for student accommodation and their numbers by institution were as follows:

Year	QUB	Ulster (Jordanstown & Belfast)	Belfast Met	St Marys	Stranmillis
2010/11	13,354	8,830	1,842	849	831
2011/12	13,765	8,864	1,491	865	890

11. Belfast is aiming to increase its international profile and appeal and Queen's University, University of Ulster and Belfast Metropolitan College are aiming to increase their international student numbers. Belfast Metropolitan does not provide student accommodation but the predicted increase in full time courses will cater for international students who would need accommodation in the city.

12. The international student profile for the Belfast's higher education institutes for 2011/12 was as follows:

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
QUB	905	1,600	2,505
St Mary's	30	5	35
Stranmillis	40	10	50
UU (Belfast & J'Town)	1,465	863	2,328
BMC	11	0	11
Total	2,451	2,478	4,929

13. The traditional markets for PBSA are international students and first year students. However, there has been a reported increase in the number of returning students applying for university managed/provided accommodation which indicates a potential increase in demand.
14. There are just fewer than 4,000 managed bed spaces in Greater Belfast for a total student population, in 2011/12, of 43,385. The majority are provided by Queen's University which owns and manages 2,243 bed spaces in and around the university area. It also markets and promotes a further 173 bed spaces at other managed halls and a further 269 bed spaces elsewhere. The University of Ulster provides 878 bed spaces at the Jordanstown campus. The Jordanstown campus accounts for 92% of non-UK domicile students at the University of Ulster. Stranmillis College provides 465 bed spaces at its campus.

University/College	Address	No. Bed Spaces 2012/2013
Queen's University (owned and managed accommodation)	Elms Village, 78 Malone Road	1,633
	Willow Walk (new)	257
	Mount Charles	157
	Grant House, 64 Malone Rd	50
	76 Malone Rd	14
	College Gardens	45
	Guthrie House Fitzwilliam	87
	Sub-total	2,243

Queen's University (marketed and promoted accommodation)*	Church of Ireland and Methodist Chaplaincies	49
	Derryvolgie Hall	88
	Union Theological College	26
	Edgehill Theological	10
	Subtotal	2,416
University of Ulster - Jordanstown Campus	Jordanstown Campus	708
	Jordanstown Head-Lease Scheme	170
	Subtotal	878
Stranmillis College	Stanmillis University College Campus	465
	Subtotal	465
Total		3,759
Total (exc Jordanstown)		2,881

** Queen's University market and promote a further 269 bed spaces in addition to those noted in the table.*

15. There is over-demand for accommodation for Queen's University owned/managed accommodation, with applications for Queen's University accommodation also made by students attending other educational institutions. The ability for QUB to accommodate non-Queen's students has declined over the past 3 years due to increasing demand from Queen's students. Occupancy levels are high for University of Ulster (90-100%) and Queen's University owned/managed accommodation (100%). Stranmillis has also reported high occupancy levels in 2012.
16. The Strategic Study of the Holyland and Wider University Area notes that Belfast differs from many other university cities in that there has been a preference among first year students for privately rented accommodation instead of university accommodation. In a May 2010 IPSOS Mori and Students Union survey of students living in the Holyland

(based on 213 face-to-face interviews), 46% of students surveyed were first year students.

17. The reasons for the preference for private rented accommodation may be affordability, proximity to social activities and nightlife and being close to other students. Students like to live with other students they already know who are attending different education institutions but also because they like the freedom they get from living off campus.
18. Queen's University has a projected demand of an additional 900 bed spaces of student accommodation by 2015. The University of Ulster has no plans to increase student numbers in the Belfast area before 2015. By 2018, it expects over 15,000 students and staff will be at the new Belfast campus development.
19. In relation to the demand and market for student accommodation it is considered that:
 - there is unlikely to be any decline in student numbers and the increase is likely to be incremental;
 - there is limited availability of PBSA in Belfast;
 - there is a need for PBSA as evidenced by the Strategic Study report and reports of increasing year-on-year demand for accommodation at QUB managed facilities;
 - the key market groups for PBSA are international students and first year undergraduates;
 - the key 'selling points' of PBSA relate to security and safety, the ease of paying and the clarity of costs for the accommodation and related services; and
 - there remains an important role for privately rented / HMO accommodation in response to the preference of first year and returning students.

POLICY CONTEXT

20. The provision of housing for students is consistent with the priorities identified in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, the strategic guidelines contained in the Regional Development Strategy 2035, the DSD Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre and the Belfast City Council Masterplan.
21. There is no specific Use Class within the Planning (Use Classes) Order (NI) 2003 for student housing. As such, housing which may be occupied by students, but which is not HMO accommodation, is subject to normal residential planning policy considerations. In relation to the regulation of HMOs, the Department for Social Development and the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive have undertaken a fundamental review of HMO regulation and it is proposed that legislative proposals will be brought forward in due course.

22. Proposals for HMOs in the Belfast City Council area are assessed against the policies of the HMO Subject Plan which provides an area-based planning policy for HMOs. It identifies 22 HMO Policy Areas, within which permission will only be granted for HMOs where the number of HMOs will not as a result exceed 30% of all dwelling units. Only 2 of the 22 areas identified were under 30% HMOs at the time of subject plan's publication. In addition, 18 HMO Development Nodes were identified where planning permission for HMOs will be granted. Outside HMO Policy Areas and Development Nodes HMO development will only be granted where it would not exceed 10% of dwellings on the road or street.
23. The HMO Subject Plan also contains a specific PBSA policy, namely Policy HMO 7 '*Large Scale Purpose Built Student Accommodation*'. Proposals comprising 50 units or 200 occupants or more will be granted planning permission subject to compliance when assessed against 5 criteria contained within the policy, namely:
 - Development of any complex consists of a minimum of 50 units or a minimum of 200 occupants. This *will not preclude proposals for smaller incremental extensions or consolidations of existing halls of residence and phased development of larger schemes*;
 - All units are self-contained (i.e. having a bathroom, w.c. and kitchen available for use by the *occupiers*);
 - The location is not within a primarily residential area;
 - Provision is made for management of all accommodation. This may require an Article 40 agreement *with Planning Service*;
 - Landscaping and amenity space is provided in accordance with a landscaping plan indicating all *landscaping proposals for the scheme and, where relevant, making provision for future maintenance*.
24. Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 also permits the Department to enter in legal agreements with any person who has an estate in land for the purpose of facilitating, regulating and restricting the development or use of land. The possible use of such an agreement is noted in relation to Policy HMO 7.

CASE STUDIES

25. University cities have developed a range of PBSA planning policies to address the matter of purpose-built student accommodation. The policies address a range of issues including strategic context, need, funding, location, management, design quality, impact and planning controls. The two key objectives of policies tend to be firstly, to maximise the benefits of PBSA (e.g. supporting a city's knowledge economy) and secondly, avoid or minimise adverse effects (e.g. adverse effects on existing communities).
26. The following strategic observations can be made about the context for and approaches to the provision of PBSA in the university cities namely:
- (i) the range of significant potential benefits provided by quality PBSA in the right locations including supporting economic regeneration or the regeneration of sites;
 - (ii) the range of potential disbenefits of student accommodation including adverse impact on residential areas, loss of family housing and cost of street based services;
 - (iii) the value of a criteria-based approach to assessing PBSA proposals which provides flexibility and is appropriate to the particular circumstances of the university city;
 - (iv) the importance of proximity in relation to university campuses as a planning policy criterion for PBSA; and
 - (v) the value of a strategic approach which is grounded in evidence (e.g. supply and demand/need figures) and capable of facilitating delivery of quality PBSA in the right locations.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING PROPOSALS FOR NEW PURPOSE BUILT STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

27. The Strategic Study for the Holyland and Wider University Area noted the key role that planning will have in shaping the future development of the city in terms of accommodating students and maximising the benefits of the Learning City concept. One of the recommended actions from the Strategic Study was the development of a new criteria based policy for assessing applications for the provision of managed student housing.

28. Policy HMO 7 Large Scale Purpose Built Student Accommodation is the only current planning policy which explicitly relates to the provision of purpose built student accommodation.

7

29. It is considered that a new criteria based planning policy for assessing applications for the provision of managed student housing could be based upon the following:

Planning permission for purpose built student accommodation will only be granted where the following criteria are met:

- **Proximity:** the development is within 15 minutes walking distance of a university/college campus or on a high frequency public transport route.
 - **Design:** the nature and scale of the development is appropriate to its context, the design and layout of the development is of high quality and all units are self-contained (i.e. having a bathroom, w.c. and *kitchen available for use by the occupants*).
 - **Management:** an appropriate Management Plan is in place to minimise potential negative impacts *from occupants and the development on surrounding properties and neighbourhoods and to create a positive and safe living environment for students*.
 - **Impact:** the proposed development, when considered with existing and approved student *accommodation development, would not result in an unacceptable impact upon surrounding residential amenity*.
 - **Need:** the development meets an identified need for the type of accommodation proposed.
30. The following explanatory text would be provided with the 5 criteria:
- **Proximity:** this criterion seeks to promote sustainable means of travel and minimise car use. *Applications should be accompanied by information on the suitability of the location of the proposal*. The fifteen minutes (or 1,200m) walking time could rise with the availability of good quality pedestrian and cycle routes. If reliant on public transport, the PBSA must be on a high frequency public transport route.
 - **Design:** this criterion seeks to promote quality in design. Applications should be accompanied by a *Design Statement containing site appraisal and concept design and a statement explaining the relationship of the proposal to the surrounding context*. *Proposals should not result in unacceptable damage to local character, environmental quality or residential amenity*.

- **Management:** this criterion seeks to promote well managed PBSA proposals whilst reducing the risk of *adverse impacts upon residential amenity. Applications should be accompanied by a Management Plan addressing, inter alia, general management operations, site and landscape maintenance, servicing, security features, CCTV, lighting, intercoms, soundproofing, noise control and tenant behaviour as well as providing a travel plan for staff and students.*
- **Impact:** this criterion seeks to promote and capture the positive impacts of PBSA and student *populations whilst reducing the risk of adverse impacts upon residential amenity. Applications should be accompanied by information on existing and approved student accommodation and the impact of the proposal upon demographics and local facilities/ service provision in an area. Information on the (social, economic and environmental) benefits of proposals, as well as any mitigation measures, should also be provided.*
- **Need:** this criterion seeks to ensure student housing needs are met. Applications should be *accompanied by evidence, as appropriate, of the specific need that is being addressed, why this need is currently unmet, the type of existing accommodation the potential student occupiers are likely to be drawn from and any recorded increase in student numbers. Evidence such as university support, waiting lists and bank funding may be helpful in demonstrating need.*

The explanatory text is subsidiary to and should not distort the meaning of the policy. Planning applications for PBSA should be accompanied by appropriate information which satisfies the 5 planning criteria. Other non-residential uses in PBSA schemes, e.g. retail, gyms and restaurants, will be considered against prevailing regional planning policy.

DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT OF PBSA

31. The identification of planning criteria for PBSA provides a planning tool to inform the preparation of proposals, assess planning applications and regulate land use in the public interest. However, planning criteria in themselves will not ensure the delivery of quality PBSA which depends on a number of factors including:
- (i) the need/demand for PBSA;
 - (ii) the availability of suitable locations/sites for PBSA;
 - (iii) the viability of individual schemes including the availability of funding;

- (iv) planning and technical approvals for the particular PBSA scheme; and
 - (v) student management and property maintenance arrangements.
32. It is considered that a significant constraint, with respect to the provision of PBSA, is financial viability due, inter alia, to the absence of a developed private PBSA market and the rents offered by the private rented sector. Research has been undertaken to assess potential forecasted investment returns for various funding models. Indications are that significant public sector investment or support may be required perhaps in the form of occupancy guarantees and financial assistance. Discussions are ongoing in relation to if and how this could be made possible.
33. There are a number of current planning applications for PBSA, other speculative PBSA proposals are being considered by private developers and a wide range of existing planning approvals for residential accommodation within the city could be utilised for student accommodation.
34. In addition the DSD has invited developer responses to the *'Northside Development Brief'* which identifies 10 potential development sites. The DSD booklet notes that developers may seek to incorporate an element of *'student living'* within proposals for the Press/Library Quarter in Northside, highlights the need to ensure that a balanced and mixed-community is not prejudiced and states that any proposal should be supported by a recognised managing agent or landlord with a successful track record of managing student living within a city centre environment.

NEXT STEPS

35. As already noted, no single organisation has the responsibility for the delivery of PBSA. In light of the need for and benefits of PBSA, it is considered that each Department has a role to play in securing the delivery of high quality PBSA. The next steps to be taken forward by the relevant agencies of the Student Housing Joint Team include:
- Progress with ongoing regeneration work (including Northside Developer Brief and Shaftesbury Square Development Framework);
 - Further work on developing a revised planning policy for PBSA and improved pre-application discussion guidance processes for planning applications;

- **Progress with legislative proposals following the fundamental review of HMO regulation in Northern Ireland;**
- **Further work on understanding financial viability and exploring options for facilitating and, if necessary, assessing the private sector or partnership delivery of PBSA schemes;**
- **Belfast City Council to consult on this document and consider adopting the proposed criteria for PBSA proposals so that they can be treated as material to planning considerations.**

- 36. Belfast City Council and its partners on the Student Housing Joint Team are committed to promoting equality and good relations and to improving the quality of life for everyone in the city. Actions taken forward will be equality screened as these are progressed and outcomes are identified.**

YOUR VIEWS

- 37. The Joint Team would welcome your views on the Discussion Document and in particular your responses to the following questions:**

- 1. Do you agree that the city should promote the value of students to Belfast and grow its potential as a destination of choice for students to study and live?**

Specify reasons:

- 2. Having regard to question 1, do you agree that the current range and choice of available student accommodation within the city could be improved to allow Belfast to realise its potential as a Learning City?**

Specify reasons:

- 3. Do you agree that there is a need and demand for more managed PBSA within the City?**

Specify reasons:

- 4. Do you agree that the five proposed planning criteria for PBSA are appropriate?**

Specify reasons:

- 5. Noting the next steps, what more do you think the public and private sectors should do to provide better managed**

accommodation for students and to promote Belfast as a destination of choice for students?

Specify reasons:"

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Consultation response - Community Asset Transfer Policy Framework

The Committee was advised that the Department for Social Development was undertaking a consultation exercise in relation to proposals for its Community Asset Transfer Policy Framework. The Director of Property and Projects explained that Community Asset Transfer was a change in management and/or ownership of land or buildings, from public bodies to communities. The Framework established 'ground rules' to govern individual transfers and sought to address the barriers which existed in terms of regulation and guidance, finance, skills and awareness, through a series of proposals.

A copy of the Council's draft response is set out hereunder:

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy Framework

Your Details

1. Are you responding on behalf of:

- Individual
- Organisation Please Specify

Belfast City Council

2. Email Address

Purchased@BelfastCity.gov.uk

Equality Monitoring - Organisation

The following questions are for equality monitoring purposes. The responses which you give to these questions are completely confidential. You are not required to answer these questions if you choose not to. However, any information, which you do provide would be much appreciated.

6. Which community does your organisation primarily serve?

Cross Community

7. Which gender does your organisation primarily serve?

Both

8. Which of the following age bands does your organisation primarily serve

All of the above

9. No individual will be identified from the analysis of responses, however under the Freedom Of Information Act 2000 individual responses may be disclosed.

Please tick here if you wish your response to be held confidential.

The following questions relate to Section 6 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

10. Do you consider that the proposed ground rules are an effective means of achieving a focus on outcomes?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

While we agree with the outcomes we feel that they are too broad for the purposes of the policy. To allow effective decision making, there needs to be more detail. A type of financial and social benefit model may help to clarify what the outcomes are and also support decision making. There should also be some acknowledgement of need and demand in an area, although we appreciate that this is better covered in detail in the decision section.

11. Do you consider that the proposed ground rules are an effective means of ensuring sustainability?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

We agree that capacity and sustainability are key issues and probably the most important of those identified in the consultation document. BCC currently have approximately 40 leases in place (some short term others long term e.g 99 years) for community, sports and other 3rd sector groups. A few of these have had to be surrendered by groups in recent years e.g. at Finlay Park, Whiterock etc, and several are struggling both in terms of financial security and delivering the expected outcomes. BCC may be able to make the lessons learnt from these examples available to supplement your planned case studies.

Although there is much evidence about the benefits of community asset transfer, there also a need to look at the processes, training, skills and financial requirements which need to be in place to ensure successful asset transfer and to ensure that they do not become liabilities. The consultation document mentions these areas but only at a very high level. Most community groups will be receptive to the idea of community asset transfer however there is a myriad of reasons why community asset transfer can fail – a

lack of capacity in community and voluntary groups to actually manage assets as well as the ongoing sustainability issues of groups. Many community & voluntary organisations in Belfast simply would not have the capacity or financial arrangements in place at the moment to successfully manage an asset transfer – some organisations cannot even pay their rent.

Generally, in relation to community assets such as community centres, the asset itself has a limited ability to generate sustainable income. Core to sustainability is that the services or activities, that are either based in the asset or which hire the asset, have the ability to pay for the use. The sustainability of the asset users usually depends heavily on grant aid and an ever decreasing public purse. This will affect the financial and business modelling required to prove the investment readiness of the organisation. This is particularly relevant to assets which are multi-user and/or multi-function. Organisations which are using a building for a single service use (e.g. childcare provision, youth club, women's centre) will pose a significant risk if they fail to secure tenders to provide local services within clearly defined neighbourhoods/areas.

With increasing cuts in public spending, future funding for buildings is likely to increasingly rely on Banks (mortgages) which is very different situation to today. Generally, there is likely to be less money in future.

From our experience it is often the case that the community do not want to actually have responsibility for the day to day work of running an asset. They usually underestimate what is required to keep an asset open. Their main interest is controlling the overall use of the asset (programming).

Therefore we feel that in many cases a staged approach to asset transfer is appropriate. That is, from a first stage of taking over the programming of activities, to leasing the asset, and finally owning. The consultation document seems focused on owning. The approach taken should depend on the level of risk, which will be effected by, among other factors, the value of the asset and the capability and sustainability of the community groups.

We note the reference to the need for business plans and agree that this is important. Our experience is that many groups do not have the experience or skill to produce a realistic longer term business plan. Where they do have experience, it is usually in producing a plan to secure short-term funding rather than a plan to sustain an asset over the longer term. Often, even the most basic aspects (insurance, bookings, accounting, etc) have not been considered or fully understood and so they completely underestimate the ongoing running costs. The plan should also show how

the group hopes to move short-term funding (grants) to longer term funding (true sustainability). Therefore we feel that there needs to be clear guidance as to what has to be covered in a business plan.

The consultation policy should also consider the longer term monitoring of assets that have been transferred and arrangements to deal with situations where the new owners are not delivering what was promised in the business plan. Again, using a staged approach with leasing before owning would be one way of ensuring that the community group was able to deliver on their promises. There should also be guidance on the development of suitable exit-strategies.

The consultation document also needs to set expectations among community groups. As presented, we feel that it is far too biased towards raising expectations that assets are going to be readily available and that any transfer will automatically create the benefits outlined. The reality is that we may need to decline requests; the groups proposed plan may not be realistic; leasing or programming might be better options; and owning an asset does not automatically guarantee the hoped for community benefits.

To put the above paragraph into context, it should be noted that BCC very rarely decline a request but we often have to work closely with groups before they are ready to take over an asset.

We would also be keen to see the results from case studies mentioned in the consultation document and are happy to share our "Discussion paper on Community Asset transfer. [Docs# 126120v 3: 16 May 2012]."

12. Do you consider that the proposed ground rules are an effective means of ensuring accountability?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

As highlighted in our response to Q11, thought needs to be given to how assets can be monitored after transfer to ensure they deliver on the promises that were used to secure the transfer. In particular, what happens when things go wrong? In extreme cases, what processes/procedures can be put in place for taking back assets?

Additionally, the short timeframe for implementation of this policy could present problems in embedding the proposals in upcoming asset transfers.

13. Do you consider that the proposed ground rules are an effective means of governing decision making?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

In terms of the key stages to consider, our team liked the decision making process as outlined as it covers many of the

key issues. However, we need to see the “more robust methodologies” before we can make specific comment.

A key aspect of decision making, which we don't feel is sufficiently addressed in the consultation document, is need assessment. Via a range of funding sources (EU, BRO,IFI, Atlantic Philanthropies, Big Lottery) the community sector in Belfast has developed a considerable level of asset acquisition. Many neighbourhoods within Belfast have an extensive physical infrastructure balanced by collaborative working arrangements, local and usually informal agreements about the function of community buildings and ensuring where possible the services do not compete for limited resources.

Need assessment requires understanding the community needs in the area around the asset and also the mapping of other assets and service provision that are already in place in that area. This should consider assets beyond just public sector assets. In particular, we need to avoid duplication. To map this provision effectively may require improved dialogue between different agencies to ascertain what each already has in place.

Critical to the success of community asset transfer is an understanding of the spatial area the asset is required to cover. Most community organisations tend to operate at a neighbourhood level with clearly defined boundaries, which are usually agreed with neighbouring communities- these tend to be informal understandings although some formal boundaries have been defined for funding delivery and regeneration purposes e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. If an asset is based within a specific neighbourhood yet is required to service more than one neighbourhood there will be a need to explore opportunities for collaboration. Alternatively an asset based within a neighbourhood may have an unintended consequence of excluding people from neighbouring communities. Voluntary organisations and organisations with a wider spatial remit e.g. arts co-operatives, may be in a more advantageous position to benefit from assets which allow them to span neighbourhoods or delivery city-wide services.

The benefits of CTA focus on social, economic and environmental regeneration. How will the community be involved in defining key regeneration priorities for their neighbourhoods? Who will set the outcomes and outputs for such regeneration activity and who will be responsible for acquiring and the effective utilisation of inputs? Regeneration is a long-term process who will define the timeframe for the outcomes?

A potential risk in relation to the implementation of CTA is the culture of the community sector and its dependency on

grant-aid. To move from grant-aid to income generation will pose significant risk to community organisations particularly those who own, lease or manage existing community facilities. Business planning has been primarily about proving to a funder that an organisation has the capacity to provide a service, manage a centre for which it is seeking full-cost recovery. This is a different set of skills to running a service and providing a building which requires you to have; business acumen, a business model and marketing plan which focus on hard targets.

There is also a significant risk that a transferred asset may fall under the influence or control of a particular group/portion of the community in an area, and that they may not be inclusive. In some areas it is not difficult to imagine that an asset might come under the influence of paramilitary organisations. More generally, there are equality issues associated with transfers and there is a need to have Expressions of Interest advertised as opposed to dealing with one group.

Other factors that need to be considered when coming to a decision include:

Recognising the future potential of open land, which includes keeping it as an open space for the public.

Current funding streams e.g. Belfast City Council is investing in local neighbourhood provision via the Investment Programme, Local Investment Fund and Belfast Investment Fund. These projects are third sector driven and will provide organisations with funding to expand, renovate, or equip their asset and enhance their level of service provision.

Striking the right balance between the social as well as economic benefits accrued through the use of the asset. Financial and social returns on the investment are critical to the success of the business model. The greater the emphasis on the social the more risk there is to the financial and thus sustainability of the asset and organisation.

The question below relates to Section 7 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

14. Do you consider that these proposals will be effective in raising the profile and understanding of Community Asset Transfer as a tool for investment and regeneration?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

As per our response to Q11, it also raises expectations among community groups. As presented, we feel that it is far too biased towards raising expectations that assets are going to be readily available and that any transfer will automatically create the benefits outlined. The reality is that owning an asset does not automatically guarantee the hoped

for community benefits nor does it guarantee investment and regeneration. The document should highlight the risks and common mistakes as well as the benefits.

The policy has the potential to raise the profile and understanding of CAT and to support aspects of regeneration for example the transformation of leisure services within Belfast but it is unclear from this document how they will be a tool for investment in the Northern Ireland.

The question below relates to Section 8 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

15. Do you consider that these proposals will be effective in 'Mainstreaming' Community Asset Transfer as an option for public sector asset management and addressing current operational barriers?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

We feel that the document is primarily written for the civil service rather than the wider public sector (see its references to departments) and that the focus is on disposing of empty/surplus buildings and saving money. In general we feel that 'Mainstreaming' is perhaps the wrong word as this is not an activity that is needed on a day to day basis; we don't have an inexhaustible supply of assets to hand over. It would help set the context if an indication was given of the number of potentially transferable buildings that are immediately available.

More detailed discussion between local and central government is required on the following:

- 1) Ways in which assets may be nominated and listed including agreed exclusions from the assets lists.
- 2) In the context of forthcoming local government reform in NI the application and monitoring of a consistent approach to Community Asset Transfer across all councils.
- 3) What is the proposed definition of an Asset of Community Value? Will this extend to cultural, recreational and sporting interests as it currently does in the Localism Act 2011?
- 4) Will there be guidelines for what is classed as disposable. It is likely that any guidance or final policy will need to be modified for Council use.

BCC have been working on an internal policy for asset transfer driven by community need. This is to become more strategic in our review of assets and to identify opportunities for transfer where there is a clear need in the community. However, it is also worth noting that requests to transfer assets also come directly from the community. There appears to be nothing in the policy on how we should deal with these requests. Regarding the list of available assets,

we feel that it should be our choice as to what we declare on the list.

An enabling environment is not just about ensuring that the legislation is in place to permit the transfer of assets it is about creating the right conditions for the community sector to maximise the benefits of transfer. Creating a supportive environment, ensuring resources are available and that stakeholders are involved in the decision making process is also critical. All communities, which wish to take advantage of CTA, must have a long-term strategy in place that clearly identifies the resources and support required to minimise risk and maximise benefits from the transfer.

However, we can and do work with community groups to support them and to create an enabling environment. Therefore the biggest overall barrier is still legislation (being able to sell for under market price, open competition, and being open to challenge) and there is not enough time to pass legislation before this policy comes into effect. Previous regional level discussions connected to RPA/LGR have highlighted the need for new legislation to allow for disposal of assets at below market value but there has been no progress.

It is also worth noting that, in our experience, Central Government departments are increasingly reiterating that they don't have the remit /legislative basis for community based activities /regeneration and won't therefore lease assets to 3rd sector groups. Instead they look to the Council to take on the asset from them in the first instance (as they see council having the remit for community development and regeneration) and then for Council to lease to the community groups e.g Lanyon tunnels; Walkway /Finvoy Street; land at Shore Road etc. Therefore, unless there is enabling legislation for these departments, the Community Asset Transfer Policy will have will have minimal impact.

The question below relates to Section 9 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

16. Do you consider that these proposals will be effective in creating and maintaining the necessary skills within public sector and third sector organisations to support implementation of Community Asset Transfer and the long term sustainable management and development of assets?

No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

The activities will help especially the publication of the case studies. However the work also needs to be supplemented with necessary training and support. While the policy may launch later this year, there needs to be more time to develop

Community Abilities. Many of the skills cannot be learnt quickly as they are more dependent on experience.
To supplement the case studies we would also appreciate information as to what percentage of transfers become truly sustainable compared to how many still need public / grant support. In our experience, most Community activities don't make money. Of those case studies that are sustainable, information about the methods used to raise money would be useful. We may be able to provide some of our own examples as case studies.

The question below relates to Section 10 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

17. Do you consider that these proposals will be effective in providing investment to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer?
- Yes
 - Don't Know
 - No. Please suggest amendments or alternatives:

Most of the suggestions in the consultation document are about re-directing grants and funding streams rather than attracting new investment. Though we do note that it can be easier for a group to leverage funding where it owns the asset. It may be that the Policy approach is expected to generate private investment through schemes such as sponsorship or possible through social enterprises. If this is the case, the policy should make this more obvious. Whatever the case, the role of the private sector should be included in the policy.

The question below relates to Section 11 of the consultation document. Please refer to this section for further information.

18. The Community Right to Buy or Right to Bid exists elsewhere in the UK as part of the enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer. We are interested in exploring opinion on whether an equivalent community right could support asset transfer in Northern Ireland. If you would like to comment on this please do so below:

We would be interested to see if the case studies show that the Community Right to Buy or Right to Bid approach is successful during an economic downturn. We are concerned that it further depress the property market and could be another barrier to investment (especially foreign) as it creates another delay and frustration. We expect that there are already enough assets in public ownership to satisfy community demand.

19. Any other comments?

UK learning points

There are clear learning points from the UK public sector with regards to CAT and community empowerment. However, the omission from this document of the many examples available within Northern Ireland of successful community asset transfer by local government and others was disappointing. The community sector in England, in particular, is notably different both in terms of council's powers, integration of the public sector, the state of the economy, etc; and also in terms of the ability and capacity of community groups. CAT in the UK is also significantly influenced by the current austerity measures and the need to make significant cuts rather to directly produce community benefits. Big Lottery funding arrangements also make a significant difference.

Impact of LGR

The policy needs to recognise the potential impact of RPA/LGR. For example, is their consistency across boundaries (and between departments and councils) for how they deal with transfers, will it cause problems when they merge? As a Council we also need to consider how this aligns with community planning, which is still in an early stage. It also needs to take into consideration other strategies including 'Together: Building a United Community'

Student accommodation

BCC would be interested to explore potential for the framework to be utilised to address community issues identified in the Holylands and Wider University Area Strategic Study report in relation to the provision of more purpose built student accommodation within the City. To do so would involve the transfer of a surplus site or building for development as purpose built student accommodation. The proposed asset transfer framework would require the accommodation provider to fall into one of the 3rd sector organisation groups as described in the framework.

This type of transfer could potentially be suitable for local religious denominations/organisations if they decided to expand their existing student accommodation provision; or for an accommodation provider to form itself as a 'social enterprise' However, most specialist student accommodation providers that are active in the UK student accommodation market would typically be private sector companies backed by international investors so would be unlikely to be able to avail of the proposed framework.'

Policy guidance

There needs to be more detail and guidance on how community asset transfer will actually be implemented. The policy proposals are very high level and generic. There is also no mention of the role of local authorities in the consultation or in its implementation – local authorities need to be involved in this from the outset. The policy should indicate how prescriptive the upcoming guidance will be. In particular, will we have to comply?

Resources

We are concerned that no additional financial resources from central government appear to have been identified to support this framework or the necessary initiatives to inform how Community Asset Transfer implemented.

Overall approach

We are concerned that the policy may underestimate the readiness of the sector to take over assets. Community Asset Transfer should be viewed as a long-term process involving four distinct phases;

- I. **Asset mapping:** analysis of the current situation regarding the community's portfolio of assets, ownership, typology of assets, their functions, condition, business model and sustainability. Does the neighbourhood require a new asset or more effective use and resourcing of existing assets?
- II. **Pre-transfer:** preparing organisations for asset-transfer. Is the organisation investment ready? Identifying relevant assets, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, financial/business modelling, market analysis, supply and demand, sustainability, succession planning, legal identity, facilities management, legal requirements e.g. health and safety, accessibility, strategic/business planning, feasibility studies, economic appraisal, risk assessment, will the asset create collaboration or competition.
- III. **Transferring the assets;** agreeing terms of transfer, service level agreements etc., extensive legal advice and input.
- IV. **Post asset transfer:** depends on business model and funding agreements. Many community organisations have been entirely dependent on grant aid. It may take an income generation/grant aid package initially to ensure the sustainability of the asset and its use. Ongoing support and technical assistance will be required.

Legislation

Finally, we would like to reiterate that the biggest overall barrier is still legislation (being able to sell for under market price, open competition, and being open to challenge) and there is not enough time to pass legislation before this policy comes into effect.

The Committee approved the draft response.

Human Resources (continued)

(With the exception of the Director of Finance and Resources, the Director of Property and Projects and the Democratic Services Officer, all other members of staff left the meeting whilst these items were under consideration.)

Retirement of Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st June, it had been advised of the intention of the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive to retire from the Council's service before the end of this calendar year. The Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive had now confirmed that he would retire with effect from 31st October 2013. At that meeting, authority had also been delegated to the Chief Executive to examine temporary measures to cover the role of Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive which essentially had two main functions – the provision of the legal function for Belfast City Council and some external bodies (that is, the Town Solicitor element of the role) and the day to day management of the Chief Executive's Department (that is, the Assistant Chief Executive element). Accordingly, the Director of Finance and Resources submitted a report in this regard.

The report indicated that the Director of Health and Environmental Services would assume responsibility for the function of the Good Relations Unit and the Legal Services Manager would undertake additional duties associated with the role of Town Solicitor. With regard to the duties of the Assistant Chief Executive, it was proposed that an appropriate officer from the Chief Executive's Department be designated from the relevant tier of management to act as Assistant Chief Executive. That would be by means of expressions of interest and, if necessary, through a merit based selection process. In addition, whilst not related to the Assistant Chief Executive's retirement, a small proportion of the savings effected would be used to make appropriate honorarium payments to lead officers of functions within the Chief Executive's Department who were required to undertake enhanced roles/additional higher level duties. Accordingly, the Director recommended that the Committee agree to the interim measures as outlined.

After a lengthy discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Hargey,
Seconded by Councillor Jones,

That the Committee agrees to approve the proposed interim arrangements to cover the role of the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive.

Amendment

Moved by Alderman Browne,
Seconded by Councillor McCarthy,

That the Committee agrees that the matter of honorarium payments to appropriate members of staff as outlined be dealt with under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive and the Committee considers

only that portion of the report related to the day to day management of the Chief Executive's Department, that is, the Assistant Chief Executive element.

On a vote by show hands three Members voted for the amendment and thirteen against and it was declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Hargey and seconded by Councillor Jones was thereupon put to the meeting when thirteen Members voted for and three against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Local Government Reform - Filling of Chief Executive Posts in New Councils

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of report in relation to the filling of Chief Executive posts in the new Councils to enable the political parties to consider the matter.

Chairman