

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 6th September, 2013

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Robinson (Chairman);
Aldermen M. Campbell and R. Newton;
Councillors Attwood, Corr, Haire, Hargey,
Hendron, Jones, Lavery, Mullan,
McCarthy, McVeigh,
Mac Giolla Mhín and Reynolds.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
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 Maskey, McCabe, A. Newton and Spence.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 9th and 23rd August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd September, subject to:

- (i) the amendment of the minute of 23rd August to include the decision of the Committee to progress the disposal of the former Maysfield Leisure Centre which had been omitted in error; and
- (ii) the omission of the minute under the heading "Retirement of Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive" which was referred back to the Committee for further consideration.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Democratic Services and Governance

Councillors' Allowances

The Democratic Services Manager advised the Committee that correspondence had been received from the Department of the Environment indicating that it had determined new maximum rates of allowances payable under the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

He explained that the Councillors' Remuneration Working Group, in its report in June, 2006, had recommended that the increase in councillors' allowances should be in line with the annual increase in the pay of local government officers. The Northern Ireland Joint Council for Local Government Services had advised the Department that agreement had been reached on a pay increase of 1% for local government officers with effect from 1st April, 2013 and the Minister for the Environment had agreed that an increase of 1% should be applied to councillors' allowances with effect from that date. That increase would not affect the separate allowance payable for members of the Statutory Transition Committee which had been established at a maximum of £2,700 per annum.

The increase applied to the basic allowance payable to councillors and increased the maximum payable per member from £9,738 per annum to £9,835 per annum. The maximum payable under the Special Responsibility Allowance had also been subjected to a 1% increase and was now £82,820. The Committee, in December, 2012, had agreed the mechanism for the allocation of payments under the Special Responsibility Allowance and set out below is the new allocations if the 1% increase were to be applied equally across a range of payments:

Allocation of Special Responsibility Allowance - September 2013

Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Standing Committees

Position	Allowance	Number of Posts	Total
Chairmen	£5,176	6	£31,056
Deputy Chairmen	£2,331	6	£13,986
Total			£45,042

Political Party Officers

Party Officer Basic Allocation £2,331

Remainder allocated to Political Party £192.27 per Member of the Party
leaders

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 6th September, 2013**

Position	Number of Members	Allocation per party Member	Allocation by Party Strength	Basic Allocation	Total
SF Party Leader	16	£192.27	£3,076.32	£2,331	£5,407.32
SF Deputy Leader				£2,331	£2,331
SF Secretary				£2,331	£2,331
DUP Party Leader	16		£3,076.32	£2,331	£5,407.32
DUP Deputy Leader				£2,331	£2,331
DUP Secretary				£2,331	£2,331
SDLP Party Leader	8		£1,538.16	£2,331	£3,869.16
SDLP Deputy Leader				£2,331	£2,331
Alliance Party Leader	6		£1,153.62	£2,331	£3,484.62
Alliance Deputy Leader				£2,331	£2,331
UUP Party Leader	3		£576.81	£2,331	£2,907.81
PUP Party Leader	2		£384.54	£2,331	£2,715.54
	51		£9,805.77	£27,972	£37,777.77

The Committee agreed to the increase in the:

- (i) Councillors' basic allowance from £9,378 per annum to £9,835 per annum with effect from 1st April, 2013; and
- (ii) Special Responsibility Allowance from £82,000 per annum to £82,820 per annum and to the allocation of the allowance payments as set out with effect from 1st April, 2013.

Human Resources

(Mrs. J. Minne, Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

Local Government Reform – Consultation Document on Procedures for the Recruitment and Selection of Chief Executives in the 11 New Councils

(Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive, left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.)

The Head of Human Resources reminded the Committee that the Environment Minister had announced that Chief Executive appointments to the 11 new councils would be made through open competition and that the Statutory Transition Committees, which had been approved by the Assembly on 1st July, 2013, would be responsible for appointing their Chief Executive through this public appointments process.

She reported that the Local Government Staff Commission had issued a consultation document on the Procedures for the Recruitment and Selection of Chief Executives in the 11 New Councils. The consultation questionnaire was seeking comment and views on a single advertisement, application and assessment centre approach for 11 Chief Executive posts and included preference options in terms of there being a single short-listing panel, or 11 individual short-listing panels. The Staff Commission had contacted the Statutory Transition Committee Chairs with a view to discussing the information which should be included about each new council in the recruitment pack for applicants. However, it was proposed that that matter be dealt with via Section 2 'Advertising the Chief Executive Posts' of the consultation document. She explained that the closing date for the completion of the consultation questionnaire was 27th September and recommended that a draft response be submitted for approval at the next meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee scheduled to be held on 20th September.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Cross-Cutting Issues

IBM Smarter Cities - Belfast Challenge

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Belfast is one of 100 cities around the world to be awarded a Smart Cities Challenge grant - worth an estimated \$400,000 in consultancy work– which will provide Belfast City Council and its partners with access to some of IBM's top experts.**
- 1.2 Each city has to work on a different city problem. The key differentiators for Belfast were the issues of 'segregation' and 'persistent deprivation'.**

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 6th September, 2013

- 1.3 A team of 6 top 'IBM experts' from across the globe (4 from the US) will spend 3 weeks looking at these issues in Belfast from Mon 16th Sept – Fri 04th October. They will interview key players in the city and will look at the stark statistics around health deprivation, segregation and sectarianism. By taking an external view of these issues and the underlying causes and using research and techniques such as predictive modelling, the team will provide a route map for the city and its partners to develop new approaches to deal with these problems.
- 1.4 This type of approach will be vital to the new function of community planning. The route map will provide recommendations on how the city needs to work collectively with government departments to share information and develop more joined up, evidence based solutions to resolve some previously intractable issues.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The '*aspiration beyond segregation*' project proposes to:

- Focus on 2 small geographical areas with some of the worst health indicators and to examine the statistics / perceptions and underlying issues including the effect of segregation as a manageable sized case study. The two areas agreed are Upper Springfield / Black Mountain/Highfield and Inner East, including Short Strand; a population size of 10,000 is considered appropriate;
- Look at evidence of what works here and elsewhere;
- Use predictive modelling and some live interactive approaches, including live data created from a social survey using social media;
- Determine what services are needed in local areas to address locally specific issues;
- For Whiterock / Black Mountain - attempt to predict what community assets and services would be placed within the Whiterock Community Corridor – Phase 2.
- For Inner East the link could be made to the potential for new joined health / educations facilities, the review of facilities at Templemore or any other regeneration scheme for the area.
- Develop a model and a route map for decision-making on dealing with local disadvantage including better provision of services and facilities.

2.2 The route map could then be used to inform the review of Leisure, the provision of community assets, community based

programmes and local investment and regeneration decisions. It could also support the development of a framework for local delivery of the OFMDFM programmes around Delivering Social Change and Building United Communities and could support better decision making on the provision of facilities and services in communities.

2.3 It could therefore not just have potential for BCC but also for other organisations investing in and providing services to the city such as Health and Social Care, education, BRO etc when collaboratively determining the level and type of provision which should be made in areas of the city and it could influence decision making around One Public Estate Programmes. Ultimately it could create a decision making platform for Community Planning and Local Area Regeneration Plans.

2.4 There will be a number of opportunities for Members to contribute to the initiative, as follows:

All Members will receive an invitation to the Opening Event in the City Hall on Tuesday 17th September from 12.00pm – 2.30pm (lunch will be served and there will be a short workshop).

A workshop will be held with the IBM team, the Party Group Leaders and local Elected Representatives in the two case study areas after S,P&R on Friday 20th September from 12.30pm – 2.00 pm (lunch will be served).

All Members will be invited to the closing event at which the findings will be presented in the City Hall on Thursday 3rd October at 12.00pm – 2.00pm (lunch will be provided).

3 Resource Implications

Financial

This consultancy is provided by IBM as a philanthropic initiative.

Human Resources

A project team has been established involving a range of officers across Health & Environmental Services, Chief Executive's Development and Finance & Resources Department. This is also supported by IBM officers.

Asset and Other Implications

None

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

There are no known equality and good relations considerations associated with the IBM Belfast Challenge at this time.

5 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the project update and consider attending the relevant events as listed above.”

During discussion, the Director of Health and Environmental Services indicated that a communications plan for the project was being developed and that she would distribute it to the Members of the Committee in due course.

After further discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and approved the programme of events, subject to arrangements being made for the IBM representatives to meet individually with any Political Party who so wished.

Consultation – Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency: Future of Vehicle Registration and Licensing in Northern Ireland

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose

To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, details of a consultation document from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) on the future of vehicle registration and licensing in Northern Ireland.

To bring to Members attention an appraisal of the consultation document that was circulated by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) who are operated by the DoE to undertake driver and vehicle licensing duties in Northern Ireland on behalf of the DVLA.

Relevant Background Information

Summary of DVLA Consultation Document

The Council received a consultation document from the DVLA outlining proposed changes to the vehicle registration and licensing in Northern Ireland. In the consultation document, the DVLA state that

‘The proposal at the heart of this consultation is to modernise the way vehicle registration and licensing

services are delivered in NI and put these on a par with services available to motorists in GB'.

In effect, this means the DVA operations in Northern Ireland will close and the services will be transferred to the UK headquarters in Swansea. At present, the DVA have headquarters in Coleraine as well as 7 local offices, one of which is in Belfast.

The consultation document notes a total of 324 posts, the majority of which are based in Coleraine, will be affected; the DVA appraisal document states that 22 staff are employed in the Belfast office. The DVLA have acknowledged that the result of the changes will have significant staffing consequences, stating:

'there will be significant impact on the staff that are currently employed in delivering vehicle registration and licensing services in NI.'

The DVLA and DoE have been holding discussions about the opportunities for redeployment in the NI Civil Service, however:

'due to the preponderance of potentially surplus staff in the Coleraine area, the vast majority of whom are in non-mobile grades or have restricted mobility due to working pattern, disability or welfare reasons, that identifying suitable redeployment opportunities may present a significant challenge'.

The DVLA document states that if the proposals are adopted, the following service improvements would be offered to all NI motorists:

- Access to electronic vehicle licensing and declaring vehicles off the road, either online or via automated telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Increased range of transaction available at post office counters, including:
 - Licensing a vehicle when changes need to be made to the vehicle registration certificate, for example change of address
 - Relicensing a vehicle when the reminder form is not available
 - Change of taxation class when a vehicle is being relicensed (for example from 'disabled' to a duty paying class
 - HGV relicensing
 - Issues of duplicate tax discs
- Introduction of a retention service for NI vehicle registration numbers (ie keeping a personalised registration number after selling the car)

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 6th September, 2013

- Telephone service for application for a duplicate vehicle registration document
- The transfer of personalised number plates between GB and NI vehicles will be simplified
- Purchase of NI and GB personalised number plates through a harmonised sales scheme
- The administration process of moving vehicle registration between GB and NI will be streamlined.

A number of benefits are also highlighted for NI businesses.

DVA Appraisal Document

The DVA are opposed to the operation moving to Swansea and have written an appraisal of the DVLA consultation document. In the appraisal, the DVA state that:

- The closure of the DVA would remove £22m per annum from the NI economy
- Centralisation of services would mean lower standards of service and the removal of choice for customers
- DVA's exemplary record of delivering high standards of service would be lost to customers
- Alternative proposals have not been fully considered by the DVLA.

These issues are dealt with in more detail in the appraisal document.

Role of Belfast City Council in driver and vehicle licensing

The council has no remit in terms of vehicle licensing; however the potential closure of the Belfast office may have some implications for the city.

Consultation Response

The closing date for feedback to the consultation paper is 12th September.

Recommendations

Councillors are asked to note the consultation document and appraisal by the DVA and either:

- Offer comments to be fed back to the DVLA in response to the proposed move of DVA services to Swansea or
- refer to party groups for party political responses."

After discussion, the Committee agreed that a response to the consultation be forwarded indicating that the Council was opposed to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) proposal to mainstream driver and vehicle licensing in Northern Ireland

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 6th September, 2013**

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with the rest of the United Kingdom and endorsed the appraisal of the consultation by the Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA) and would encourage the DVLA to give further consideration to alternative proposals which the DVA had put forward in its appraisal documents.

Chairman