

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 8th November, 2013

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Robinson (Chairman);
Alderman Campbell; and
Councillors Carson, Clarke, Corr, Haire, Hargey,
Hendron, Jones, McCabe, Mac Giolla Mhín, McVeigh,
Mullan, Newton, Reynolds and Spence.

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

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Newton and Councillors Attwood and McCarthy.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 11th and 25th October were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th November.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Finance/Value-for-Money

Occupational Health and Employee Counselling Contracts

The Director of Property and Projects advised the Committee that both the Occupational Health and Employee Counselling contracts provided essential services to the Council for the following reasons:

- the Council had a statutory duty to ensure the health and safety of its employees and the health and wellbeing of its workforce was an important element of that; and

- both Occupational Health and Employee Counselling were vital to effective management of the Council's attendance levels.

Occupational Health Contract

He reported that, following a public tendering exercise, the contract for the provision of Occupational Health Physician Services had been awarded to Independent Occupational Health Limited. The contract had been awarded for a period of two years, with the option of renewal for a further period of one year, subject to satisfactory performance. The additional one year period had been exercised and the contract was now due for renewal by the end of January, 2014.

Employee Counselling Services

Following a public tendering exercise, the contract for the provision of an Employee Counselling Service had been awarded to Apeideo Associates. The contract had been awarded for a period of two years, with the option of renewal for a further period of one year, subject to satisfactory performance. The additional one year period for that contract had also been exercised and was now due for renewal by the end of December, 2013.

The Director of Property and Projects explained that the Council had implemented a new attendance policy in January, 2010. In line with best practice, that policy was currently under review. It was, therefore, essential that a full review of both contract specifications was undertaken and that the user departments had the opportunity to contribute. That would ensure that the best possible value for money services were contracted. In order to enable that work to be undertaken, the Committee was being requested to grant an extension of no longer than six months (under the current terms and conditions) to complete the reviews of the contract specifications and the related procurement exercise.

He pointed out that the tenders would be evaluated using pre-determined criteria, including both cost and quality, in liaison with the Corporate Procurement Services. It was proposed that the contracts would be for a period of two years, with the option of a one year extension, depending on performance/requirements. The current contracts were valued annually at £101,000 for Occupational Health and £137,000 for Employee Counselling. Provision for the expenditure had been included in the revenue budgets, however, that was expected to increase in line with current usage.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- (i) agreed to extend the current Occupational Health and Employee Counselling contracts for a maximum period of six months; and
- (ii) approved the commencement of tendering exercises for the Occupational Health and Employee Counselling Service contracts under delegated authority, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, to the Director of Finance and Resources to approve the most advantageous tenders received.

**Notice of Motion re: Belfast City Centre –
Enhanced Christmas in Belfast Campaign**

The Committee agreed to defer for a period of one week consideration of a report in relation to funding for an Enhanced Christmas in Belfast Campaign to enable those Political Parties on the Council who so wished to receive a briefing on the proposals.

The Committee agreed that a special meeting, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, be held at 12.00 noon on Friday, 15th November to consider a further report in this regard.

Asset Management

**Request for the Use of the City Hall grounds
by Disability Pride for a Disability Event**

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from Disability Pride to hold a large-scale disability related event, which would involve the setting up of staging and marquees in the grounds of the City Hall. The Director of Property and Projects reminded the Committee that it had delegated authority to himself for routine type requests for the use of the City Hall grounds on the basis of an agreed set of criteria. However, it had been recognised that there would still be occasions when the nature, scale and/or scope of the request meant that it was appropriate to place the matter directly before the Committee. The request from Disability Pride fell into that category and the direction of the Committee was therefore being sought.

The Director explained that Disability Pride had been formed in Chicago in 2003. Each year the organisation arranged a parade through the city to celebrate the lives of people with a wide range of disabilities. It also highlighted ways of increasing accessibility for those living with a disability. Every year since its inception, Disability Pride had requested a new city in the USA and Canada to join the network of those participating in the parade. For the first time two European cities, that is, Madrid and Berlin, had been asked to join the network and had held parades and post parade events earlier in the year.

Disability Pride had recognised the work of Trip-Ability.com, which was a Northern Ireland based web company, which was considered to be progressive on disability issues. Trip-Ability.com was dedicated to sharing experiences of travel, entertainment and products with a disability community around the world. Michael Holden and Nigel Millen from the company had been asked to host the first Disability Pride event in the United Kingdom and Ireland and they had, in turn, chosen Belfast City. The provisional date for the parade was 20th September, 2014. The parade would leave Custom House Square at 11.00 a.m. and make its way through High Street and Royal Avenue before finishing at the City Hall for a major event. The parade would consist of disabled people, carers, advocates and healthcare professionals. In the City Hall grounds an entertainment concert area would be set up on one of the grass areas, with the retail food and village on the other. There would be a wide range of exhibits, family attractions and entertainment to keep everyone in the carnival spirit.

Disability Pride was a non-profit organisation and the event was not a commercial venture. It would be delivered by the organisers in partnership with suitable disability related sponsors. Retailers would pay a nominal pitch fee for space to offset the event costs for the day. Entrance to the event would be free and strictly controlled collection points for designated charities under the Disability Pride branding would be in place to allow members of the public to make donations.

The Committee agreed to accede to the request from Disability Pride to use the City Hall grounds on 20th September, 2014 and to have the use of one of the City Hall rooms either during or prior to the event.

Disposal of Land at Cliftonville Playing Fields

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 At its meeting on 6 February 2007 the Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries Services) Sub-Committee approved the disposal of approximately 1.3 acres of land at Cliftonville Playing Fields for the provision of an Irish Medium Primary School. Due to changes in budget priorities the Department of Education (the project funder) decided not to proceed with the acquisition of the relevant land at that time and the matter lapsed.**
- 1.2 In September 2011 the Department of Education (DE) again approached the Council with a view to acquiring a small portion of the Playing Fields site for the provision of an Irish Medium Nursery Unit. The Departments' proposal was to commence the Nursery as soon as possible with a view to provision of the primary school facilities at the earliest opportunity thereafter. By this stage the Council had developed its Pitches Strategy and had proposals to develop a series of 3G pitches across the city, with the site at Cliftonville Playing Fields among them. In view of this the Council sought to minimise the site area to be devoted to the Nursery Unit and proposed primary School.**
- 1.3 At its meeting on 12 April 2012 the Parks and Leisure Committee agreed to grant a five year lease to the Trustees of Bunscoil, on 0.29 acres of Council land, at a rent of £1780 per annum, to facilitate development of a Nursery Unit. The lease was constructed in such a way as to allow the leased area to be subsumed within any land transfer arrangements which may arise in connection with the DE's proposals for development of a primary school at this location. This decision was approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 25 April 2012.**

- 1.4 It is worth noting that the land at Cliftonville Playing Fields is held by the Council on a 10,000 year lease granted by the Department of Education and Belfast Education and Library Board, subject to the land being used for “playing field and other recreational purposes only and for no other purpose (except with the prior written consent of the Department and the Board)”. The land was leased to the Council for a nominal sum.
- 1.5 Since the autumn of 2012 Council officials have been in discussions with DE officials regarding the proposed disposal by the Council of land to facilitate provision by DE of an Irish Medium Primary School on the site, to sit alongside the proposed Nursery Unit. At an early stage in these discussions it was communicated to the DE that the development of the Council’s proposed 3G pitch facility would become much more expensive if the primary school development proceeded. The reasons for increased costs stem from having to move the proposed pitch further back into the site and the resultant additional civil engineering works arising from increased differences in land levels on the southern portion of the site.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 The above mentioned discussions with DE officials have resulted in the following proposals which have been agreed between Council officers and Land and Property Services (who are acting for DE).
1. The Council propose to dispose of approximately 0.85 acres (which includes the site of the Nursery Unit) to the Trustees of Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain and provide the Trustees with shared use of a further 0.49 acres (approximately) of land to provide shared parking and access arrangements.
 2. Taking account of the restrictions on use if the site, as contained in the Council’s title, the disposal price of the land is agreed at £43,000 (subject to such minor pro rata adjustments to the sale price and site boundaries as may be required to reflect the final scheme).
 3. The DE will also 100% fund any additional costs to the Council arising from the re-location of the pitch further back on the site in order to accommodate the school development. The latest available estimate of these additional costs is £390,208. These costs will be monitored throughout the construction project and adjustments applied to reflect the actual outturn costs

4. The construction costs associated with provision of the proposed shared parking and access arrangements will be split on a 50/50 basis between the DE and the Council. Future maintenance costs associated with the shared areas will be similarly split on a 50/50 basis.
- 2.2 It is further agreed that arrangements associated with operation of the completed school and the 3G pitch are matters for further discussion and negotiation between the Council, the DE, the school Trustees and local sporting clubs. There is potential for benefits in terms of joint use of changing accommodation and meeting rooms within the school.
- 2.3 It is recognised the construction phase for the school and the 3G pitch cannot proceed until such times as the legal agreements associated with the land transfer are completed.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Finance

The disposal price of £43,000, allied to the 100% DE funding of the Council's additional development costs, represents 'best price' to the Council and complies with the Council's obligations as contained in Section 96 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972. The proposed 50/50 split of the construction and maintenance costs of the shared areas is considered to reasonably represent the proportionate use to be made of these areas by the Council and the school.

3.2 Human Resources

Resources in Property and Projects, Legal Services and Parks and Leisure Department will be involved in drawing up and completing the necessary legal agreements and undertaking future maintenance work on the car park and access areas.

3.3 Asset and Other Implications

The disposal of approximately 0.85 acres and the sharing of use on a further 0.49 acres will provide for the development of an Irish Medium School whilst still ensuring development of a 3G pitch and the potential for future shared use. The disposal arrangements will however ensure the Council's current primary goal of delivering a 3 G pitch and changing accommodation at this location, can proceed without the Council having to fund any additional costs resulting from disposal of land for school purposes.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 Committee is recommended to approve the terms of disposal to the Trustees of Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain in respect of approximately 0.85 acres of land together with shared access over approximately 0.49 acres, on the terms as outlined in the body of this report and subject to an appropriate legal agreement to be drawn up by Legal Services, to include the surrender of the current 5 year lease between the Council and the Trustees in respect of the Nursery Unit.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Chairman