

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd January, 2015

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Reynolds (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Hendron);
Alderman Robinson;
Councillors Attwood, M. E. Campbell, Carson,
Clarke, Haire, Hargey, Jones, Kennedy,
McCarthy, Mac Giolla Mhín, McVeigh,
Mullan and Newton.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Aldermen Browne and Campbell, together with Councillor Corr.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th January.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Disposal of Land at Slievegallion Drive

(Mrs. C. Reynolds, Estates Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report regarding the costs associated with disposal of land at Slievegallion Drive to enable Council officials to host a further meeting with local residents in respect of the proposed development.

Democratic Services and Governance

February Meeting of the Committee

The Committee agreed to hold a short meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday, 13th February, to consider any urgent issues which might arise and that a meeting of the Shadow Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

would take place at 11.00 a.m. that morning to consider a number of matters pertaining to the new Council.

Requests for the Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality

The Committee was advised that the undernoted requests for the use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality had been received:

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date - Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Cancer Focus Northern Ireland	European Cancer Leagues Annual Conference Dinner 12th November, 2015 Approximately 60 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 meeting 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 £300
Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce	Belfast Business Awards 2015 27th May, 2015 Approximately 350 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	This event will provide the opportunity to reward and acknowledge the work of the many businesses throughout Belfast who contribute not only to economic well-being of the City but also provide employment for many of the City's citizens. This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership - strong, fair, together' and 'Better opportunities for success across the city'.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wine and soft drinks Approximate cost £500

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date - Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Common Purpose	Meridian Course Final Day and Award Ceremony 6th August, 2015 Approximately 50 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits.	<p>'Meridian' is a leadership programme that brings together a diverse group of leaders from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors. The participants learn how to improve their capacity to lead, effect change and expand their networks through the investigation of real-life challenges.</p> <p>This event will recognise the achievements of those individuals who have successfully completed the Meridian Programme.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership - strong, fair, together' 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.</p> <p>Approximate Cost £125</p>
Belfast Teachers' Credit Union	50th Anniversary Celebration 9th October, 2015 Approximately 250 attending	The use of the City Hall	<p>This event will celebrate 50 years of the Belfast Teachers' Credit Union and its work in supporting not only its members but also young student teachers in Belfast through its scholarship scheme, together with donations to various charities in the City and also to international charities.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together' and 'Better support for people and communities'.</p>	The use of the City Hall

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date - Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Black Mountain Shared Space Project	Launch of Shared Neighbourhood Survey 21st April, 2015 Approximately 50 attending	The use of the City Hall	<p>This event will provide the opportunity to present the results of the cross-community survey undertaken to ascertain residents' views on all aspects of local services.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'Better support for people and communities' and 'Better Services – listening and delivering'.</p>	The use of the City Hall
Belfast Men's Health Group	Men's Health Week Event 2015 18th June, 2015 Approximately 300 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of tea/coffee and biscuits	<p>This event will build on the success of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 events and will focus on the theme of Men's Health Week "Voices" with the aim of highlighting how others deal with traumatic experiences, overcome adversity and which forms of support they found most beneficial.</p> <p>This event aims to promote the importance of men taking part in physical activity while highlighting the range of activities they can participate in to enhance their health.</p> <p>This event would contribute to the Council's Key Themes of 'City Leadership – Strong, Fair, Together', 'Better opportunities for success across the city' 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 £750</p>

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date - Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	Service of Remembrance for Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children 18th October, 2015 Approximately 350 attending	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of Tea, Coffee and Biscuits	This event will provide an opportunity for bereaved parents and relatives of children to come together and remember their loved ones and to share their experiences with other parents. 300 parents and children along with staff from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children participate and every year the Lord Mayor is invited to attend to light the Candle of Remembrance. 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 Tea, Coffee and Biscuits Approximate cost £875

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Award of the Freedom of the City - Michael Longley

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Council that it confer on Michael Longley the Freedom of the City and that a special meeting of the Council for that purpose would take place on Monday, 2nd March, to be followed immediately by the monthly meeting.

Finance/Value-for-Money

Audit Panel

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Panel of 13th January.

Budget and Transformation Panel

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel of 12th January.

Human Resources

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 a number of individuals who were related to existing officers of the Council.

Noted.

Asset Management

Miscellaneous

In accordance with Standing Order 46, the Committee adopted the following recommendations:

- The Waterworks Parks – Licence Agreement

The Committee granted approval to 'Grow' to carry out minor site works within the Community Garden at the Waterworks Park. The proposed works would include the installation of drainage, paths, seating and the undertaking of a tree survey. That decision was in accordance with the recommendation of the Parks and Leisure Committee of 15th January.

- Shaftesbury Recreation Centre – Rent Review

The Committee approved a revised rent of £36,700 per annum, which would be backdated to 3rd February, 2014, in relation to the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group's lease of the Shaftesbury Recreation Centre, as recommended by the Development Committee at its meeting on 16th December.

- Smithfield Market – Future Lettings

The Committee agreed to delegate functional responsibility for the letting of units at the Smithfield Market to the Director of Property and Projects, subject to such decisions being reported retrospectively to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Good Relations and Equality

Minutes of Good Relations Partnership

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

Cross-Cutting Issues

Flood Alleviation in Belfast

The Committee considered the following report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will be aware that Belfast has been impacted by a number of serious flooding incidents since 2005, in particular in 2012, and the Council had identified a number of flooding areas of particular concern. Following the serious flooding in June 2012 Members agreed that work be commissioned to allow the Council to develop a better understanding on the most significant flood risk areas in the city and to identify what additional measures would be needed to alleviate those risks. It was agreed that this work would be undertaken by the Council in conjunction with the three main drainage agencies; DRD Roads Service (now Transport NI), Northern Ireland Water and DARD Rivers Agency.
- 1.2 There has been considerable progress in addressing flood alleviation in the city since June 2012 and the purpose of this report to Committee is to highlight some of the main improvements (including those which are planned but not yet completed) and the outstanding issues mentioned in the research report, including the lack of progress in establishing a scheme for individual property protection.
- 1.3 Members will recall that Rivers Agency drafted a business case for such a scheme almost a year ago and the Chair of this Committee wrote to both DARD and DFP in February 2014 seeking clarification on the proposals, finance, timeframes and administrative arrangements for the scheme and welcoming early discussions on the implications of the proposed scheme for councils. The scheme is still under consideration by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Flood Alleviation Measures

The number of government departments and agencies with responsibilities for flood alleviation makes it difficult to establish a single process that covers all the issues involved in improving the flood resilience of the city. However since the URS Report and a number of other reports published following the June 2012 flooding there has been considerable investment

and much work done to alleviate flooding in Belfast. For example, phase one of the Connswater Community Greenway project and the flood defences at Victoria Park have been completed. This ensured that the Orangefield and Sandhill areas did not flood during recent flooding events. Phase two of the project is underway and will provide additional protection around the other culverts feeding into the Connswater and Loop rivers. A number of other significant schemes for Finaghy, Greystown and the Upper Malone area have also been launched and are due to commence next spring. These schemes will use a number of the mechanisms suggested in the report to deliver integrated solutions to flooding.

- 2.2 Coastal flood plans are well progressed and NIE, BT and NIW have taken action to protect their infrastructure in flood risk areas. In particular there has been considerable work to improve the resilience of the NIW pumping station at Sydenham. There is also a proposal to upgrade this pumping station to increase its capacity; and a further proposal to rebuild it in a new location.
- 2.3 The research report outlines other investigative and improvement work throughout the city including replacement gullies and manholes at Knocknagoney, repairs to collapsed sewers at Tennent Street and Tildarg Street, upgrading of river grilles at Knock Dual carriageway and replacement of a storm sewer pipeline in the Castlewood Manor area. The Report identifies the York Street Interchange Scheme as an example of a collaborative multi-agency approach having the potential to provide significant flood alleviation benefits for Belfast.

Innovative Approaches

- 2.4 Looking forward the report identifies that potential exists within Belfast for the implementation of a wide variety of Sustainable Drainage Solutions (SuDS), alongside traditional drainage methods, to help alleviate flooding. SuDS are forms of surface water management, which aim to be more sustainable than traditional piped systems, reducing both the risk of flooding and pollution. The report points to the potential for the Council to work with the Storm Water Management Group, the Rivers Agency and others to develop a green infrastructure plan for the brownfield sites in the city. It also recommends the alignment of planning processes within the city and consideration of how Belfast City Council Masterplan or new development plan can influence flood alleviation in line with Planning Policy Statement 15 (PPS15).

Individual Property Protection Scheme

- 2.5 The URS Report makes it clear that establishing a culture of self-help and resilience in neighbourhoods is an important aspect of flood protection and it refers to the business case developed by Rivers Agency for an individual property protection scheme. The Report suggests that such a scheme has significant potential to empower the public to help themselves, to reduce the likelihood of their homes flooding and to prevent financial hardship. It was proposed that this scheme would replace the current Flooding Hardship Payment Scheme, which the Council administers on behalf of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and it was anticipated that Rivers Agency would engage the Council regarding the administrative arrangements for the introduction of this scheme. However nearly a year on the business case for the scheme is still with DFP.

Recent Flooding

- 2.6 There were three significant severe weather events in October and November of 2014 which resulted in 49 properties in Belfast receiving a £1000 payment for severe inconvenience. It was interesting to note that 48 of those payments were made for the flooding on 16th October; an event which occurred very suddenly with a 'Yellow' severe weather warning and an advisory email from the Met Office issued less than two hours before the flooding occurred. This differed from the event of 6th November for which there was an 'Amber' warning in place well in advance and the public and drainage agencies were much better prepared to cope with the severe weather. The Council delivered sandbags throughout the day in advance of the rain and a number of river grills and gullies in flood prone areas were cleared. There were many factors associated with these events but observation would suggest that advance warning and a coordinated and collaborative preventative approach in November did help to mitigate the impacts of the heavy rain and prevent internal flooding on both 6th and 13th November, when only 1 property was flooded internally.
- 2.7 It should be noted that a significant number of the properties in south Belfast which flooded during recent events will benefit from the Finaghy, Greystown and Upper Malone schemes mentioned above. However the Report identified a number of other areas across the city where there was no particular reason for the flooding beyond the drains not being able to cope with the extreme conditions. Many of these areas are on the NIW DG5 Register. This is a register of properties at risk from internal flooding in a 2 in 10, 1 in 10 and 1 in 20 year return

period rainfall event. Capital investment projects are identified to remove as many of these properties as possible from the register but it is a regional register with over 200 properties on it and the proposed schemes are obviously subject to funding and approval from the Utility Regulator. Again the number of houses on the DG5 register and other properties where there is no remedy available to prevent flooding during extreme weather emphasises the need for a robust and accessible individual property protection scheme.

Outstanding Issues

- 2.8 A number of the operational flood planning groups have been collapsed down and merged with groups within the new regional resilience structures to achieve more streamlined and connected planning. However there is still a need to consider merging a number of the groups at a strategic level to establish a single forum or overseeing organisation to harmonise the work that is currently being undertaken by the drainage agencies and effectively connect with other organisations such as the Council to support working towards a strategic and comprehensive integrated planning approach to flood alleviation for Belfast. Such an approach could include developing similar innovative schemes to those mentioned in the research, for example developing a mechanism whereby funding could be made available to members of the public incentivising them to install sustainable drainage systems within their property boundary (similar to installing solar panels).
- 2.9 The Research concludes that it is difficult to establish a single process that will cover all issues involved in trying to improve the flood resilience of Belfast and it makes it clear that all flooding cannot be prevented. It is disappointing therefore to note that the Rivers Agency scheme for individual property protection has not progressed beyond DFP as the investment created by the proposed scheme, together with the planned area improvement schemes has the potential to have a significant impact on improving flood alleviation in Belfast. Individual property protection is particularly important at this time of government cuts with the DOE proposing to withdraw the scheme of emergency financial assistance. The current scheme provides the £1000 payments to householders and enables the Council to engage contractors to assist with the cleanup of properties and other related services.

2.10 An update report was provided at the December meeting of the Emergency and Severe Weather Working group who recommended this to be considered at the next Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

3 **Resource Implications**

3.1 The current DOE budget consultation proposes to withdraw the scheme of emergency financial assistance which could impact on the Council's ability to support the response to and recovery from flooding in the city. The Council currently claims back costs for deploying contractors for cleanup of properties, additional working out of hours and contractor costs for sandbag deliveries, conference calls, and such like. There is no money in the revenue estimates to cover these costs.

4 **Equality and Good Relations Considerations**

4.1 No particular considerations

5 **Call In**

5.1 This report is subject to call in

6 **Recommendations**

6.1 It is recommended that Members note the report and the significant progress that has been made to reduce the risk of flooding in areas of Belfast since June 2012. Members are also requested to note some of the barriers that still exist to achieving an integrated approach flood alleviation planning in the city.

6.2 It is recommended that the Committee agrees to write to the Finance and Personnel Minister with regard to the urgent need for a robust and accessible individual property protection scheme to prevent flooding; and to encourage the establishment of a single strategic overseeing group for Belfast to address integrated flood alleviation planning and other significant issues highlighted in this report."

During discussion, Members made the point that the Council's proactive approach to the issue of flooding was not being reciprocated by the agencies which were responsible primarily for the problem. Reference was made also to the fact that, given the extension of the Council's boundary into Castlereagh and Lisburn councils as a result of the Reform of Local Government, additional flooding 'hot spots' would come under the Council's remit, thus exacerbating the problem. It was suggested that the Council should

seek to engage with the full range of government departments and the letter which would be forwarded to the Finance Minister suggesting the *“urgent need for a robust and accessible individual property protection scheme to prevent flooding”*, should be copied also to the ministers with responsibility for the departments of Social Development (DSD) and Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) for information and comment.

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that the correspondence to the Finance Minister would be copied also to the ministers with responsibility for DSD and DARD as outlined.

Homelessness in Belfast

The Committee considered the following report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Following on from discussions at both the Health and Environmental Services Committee meeting and that of the Budget Panel in December 2014, a report for information was requested in relation to;

- On-going work regarding Homelessness in the City,
- The Council’s engagement with the relevant agencies,
- How the Council could co-ordinate initiatives with other public bodies and private sector businesses in the City to provide short term support and longer term assistance in tackling homelessness in the City

1.2 According to the Northern Ireland Housing Statistics Department for Social Development, 18,862 households presented themselves as homeless in 2013/2014 in NI.

1.3 More specifically, from 1st April 2014 to 6th January 2015:

- Across the Greater Belfast Area (including East Belfast Housing, Homeless Services Unit*, North Belfast, Shankill, South Belfast and West Belfast), the number of households presenting as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was 4,056
- Across the outlying areas (Castlereagh, Lisburn Antrim Street and Lisburn Dairy Farm) the number of households presenting as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was 1,712

** The Homelessness Services Unit is located in Belfast. They will normally deal with clients who present in Belfast but do not have a fixed address in the Belfast area, e.g., no fixed abode,*

people from outside NI etc. People who are homeless from a previous Belfast address will normally present to the District in which their former home was situated.

1.4 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2012 -2017 states:

- Homelessness continues to be a significant challenge in Northern Ireland and a problem that afflicts the lives of many of our citizens.
- There are numerous reasons for homelessness; family dispute, breakdown in living arrangements, addiction, mental ill health, debt and tenancy breakdown and so on.
- The effect of homelessness impacts on individual lives for years and this influence goes beyond the immediate lack of accommodation.
- It impedes an individual's health, financial and social well being. For this reason, no one organisation or agency can address these issues in isolation.
- There is now a greater need than ever to respond to homelessness in a coordinated multi agency approach as required in the legislation** and for each partner to contribute their expertise and resources to promote social inclusion.

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**** *The Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended)***

1.5 The Lord Mayor, Councillor Nichola Mallon, has established and chaired a multi-agency planning group with key organisations, statutory and voluntary representatives, which had its first meeting on 30th October 2014 to discuss her priorities for her term regarding homelessness. This was the first of its kind. Her priorities included the delivery of two events for homeless individuals:

- 1. A Christmas Lunch for single adults**
- 2. A Shrove Tuesday event for families**

1.6 The organisations involved in the events include: Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland, The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, DePaul, Welcome Organisation, Extern, The Salvation Army and The Simon Community. They have all welcomed the focus on homelessness and the two events being organised, and are supportive of the focus that Belfast City

Council and the Lord Mayor has brought to opening up of the City Hall to homeless people.

- 1.7 At the City Hall Christmas Lunch on 19th December, the Lord Mayor welcomed 80 homeless people from across Belfast and hosted a Christmas lunch for those facing Christmas alone or on the streets.
- 1.8 This planning group, under the Chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, will co-plan and co-deliver the second event, a Shrove Tuesday event on February 17th 2015 and will once again engage with those who are homeless in Belfast, working in partnership with the organisations. Families will be the target audience for this event.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The Lord Mayor has given her commitment to:

- Support the forgotten citizens of the city and shine a light on the issue of homelessness
- Remind everyone of the issue of homelessness especially the statutory agencies and their duty of care
- Make the City Hall accessible for all of the citizens of Belfast City so everyone has a place.

2.2 There is now a greater need than ever to respond to homelessness using a coordinated multi agency approach and it is proposed that the planning group established to deliver the Christmas and Shrove Tuesday events continues to meet to take on this role. The statutory and voluntary partners involved have considerable expertise and resources to promote social inclusion in tackling this issue of homelessness and it is recommended the Council continues to support this group.

2.3 At the most recent multiagency planning meeting hosted by the Lord Mayor on 15th January the members confirmed the positive benefit of continuing to meet around this agenda, the benefits of a civic lead focus, and their willingness to look at a more strategic approach to tackling the issues in Belfast . One of the initial pieces of work will be to look at the gaps in service provision in the city and look at best practice elsewhere. The Lord Mayor is intending to visit Dublin to look at the recent challenges that city has faced and to look at what initiatives have been put in place. The role of the Council will be in the first instance to facilitate the discussions and this will be supported by staff within the Environmental Health Service.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 Una Lappin, the Health Equity Project Officer will continue to support the Shrove Tuesday event in partnership with the Lord Mayor and all of the key organisations. Post the February event, officers will continue to support the BCC focus on the issue of Homelessness, with other relevant services/units within Council.**

4 Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 4.1 There are no relevant equality and good relations implications**

5 Recommendation

- 5.1 The Council to continue to co-ordinate and facilitate the planning group of key organisations to address homelessness issues in the City.”**

After discussion, during which a number of Members welcomed the findings as set out within the report, the Committee adopted the recommendation.

Belfast City Council - Transition Process

The Committee was advised that there remained a number of operational requirements to be carried out in respect of the ‘winding-up’ of the existing Council. Those requirements included the arrangements for the final meeting of the existing Council, the approval of the final minutes and the preparation of the final statement of accounts.

The Chief Executive informed the Members that the requirements for the final meeting of the Council were set out under Regulation 10 of the Local Government (Transitional, Supplementary, Incidental Provisions and Modifications) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014. She pointed out that, following the final meeting of the Council, those minutes would be sent to all Members who were present inviting representations to be made within seven days. At the end of that period, the Chairperson would consider any representations made and, if necessary, alter and then sign the minutes accordingly.

In addition, the legislation stipulated that the new Council must designate an officer with responsibility for the winding-up of the former Council. That officer, as stipulated under the legislation, would be the Chief Financial Officer who would have overall responsibility for that process. The Chief Financial Officer would be responsible also for ensuring the preparation of the final statement of accounts for the former Council.

The Chief Executive outlined also the plans which had been formulated to mark the ending of the former Belfast City Council. She indicated that two events would take

place to acknowledge the contributions which had been made by both Elected Members and staff since 1973. Those events are set out as follows:

- an event for Elected Members which would take place on Thursday, 12th March, between 12 noon and 2.00 p.m. All former Lord Mayors since 1973 would be invited to attend with Members of the current and Shadow Council; and
- an event for staff which would take place on Monday, 30th March, between 1.00 p.m. and 2.00 p.m., to which all Elected Members from the current and Shadow Council would be invited to attend also.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and authorised the holding of the two events as outlined, financial provision for which had been included within the budget allocated for Local Government Reform.

Chairman