



Belfast City Council

Corporate Centre Review



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A Report by Sector Projects

Executive Summary

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SECTOR
PROJECTS

Executive Summary

We have produced this report as part of an overall high-level review of the centre of the organisation. For this reason, many of the recommendations suggest the need for further work to identify clear ways forward and detailed implementation paths. We have reviewed the role of Finance in greater detail and a separate report has been produced, supporting the recommendations in this report.

We retained a 'helicopter view' of the organisation, without going too deeply into the complexities of individual services, apart from Finance. We talked to Elected Members, 50 senior officers, including every member of the Chief Officers Management Team. We also talked to staffing representatives.

The corporate centre of Belfast City Council is large and fulfils many functions. We believe it could be better co-ordinated to meet several key challenges ahead:

- The present economic climate and the need for the Council to provide greater value for money;
- Changes in the Chief Officers Management Team;
- The Review of Public Administration; and
- Belfast's extending role as a city region.

We believe that there are opportunities to reduce overlap and duplication both at the centre and between the centre and the support functions within Departments. We recommend a rationalisation of review functions and the urgent need to take closer governance and control of both finance and HR functions given the emergence of important challenges in both areas. We identify significant opportunities to make savings and to redirect resources to front line services. These will take time to achieve, but offer significant opportunities for efficiencies and service improvements.

We support the moves to improve performance monitoring and management information across the organisation and recommend that this process is accelerated. We also recommend changes in the organisation to support initiatives designed to improve customer services.

The key opportunity is to 'demystify' the relationship between the centre and managers in service departments. We recommend that the central functions should support the departmental managers in their day to day deployment of the resources of the Council in delivering services. We believe that the centre should focus on setting out the framework or rules, within which departmental managers would manage people and assets, and seek changes in policy and procedures. At present, we conclude that the relationship is too much balanced towards central functions 'stepping in' to deliver the support functions more directly.

We also observe a level of non-compliance with corporate initiatives which needs addressing.

The Chief Executive has already taken steps to review the 'fitness for purpose' of the organisation in advance of a series of challenges which face the City Council. This includes governance and decision-making, the performance and efficiency agendas, the need to review the financial resources likely to be available to the Council and, critically, the capacity of the organisation to deliver on some major projects already planned. Much

of the work we have undertaken lately is in support of these initiatives.

This report has been produced with the support and co-operation of officers of the City Council. We could not have produced it without their openness, active support and willingness to contemplate new ways of doing things, with some very challenging options.

Our grateful thanks go to them.

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