



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Operational Changes to the Security Unit</b>
<b>Date:</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> August, 2009
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### Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that, in October 2006, a special meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee considered a report setting out a number of potential options for the future size, role and cost of the in-house Security unit. After some debate, it was agreed that the unit should continue to provide services at the agreed locations on a 24/7 basis and that permanent staffing numbers should be enhanced, but that the cost of overtime must be reduced and that the necessary operational changes in order to achieve this must be identified and pursued.

However in early 2007 the closure of the City Hall for refurbishment was announced and so, following discussions with the various trades unions, it was agreed that the implementation of these operational changes be deferred until the City Hall was once again available for occupation. In the interim, the trades unions agreed to initiate a number of changes on an interim basis, including agreement to rotate around all of the various premises and the operation of a system of 'pool' cover (which ensures that the first 4 occurrences of leave or sickness absence on any given day are covered in normal time at no additional cost to the unit). In return for these changes, the management side agreed to postpone dealing with a number of related issues, most notably the categorization of the posts and the removal of contractual and 'compulsory' overtime.

Members will be aware that overtime is woven into the fabric of the rosters and working practices of the Security unit for a number of increasingly irrelevant historical reasons. Currently the cost of overtime annually for the unit is approaching **£300,000**, and 51% of this is due solely to the existence of 3 hours contractual overtime per week and the existence within the rotas of between 8 and 12 days per employee of what is referred to as 'compulsory' overtime on Saturdays and Sundays. All of this is in place because the unit apparently chose - for whatever reasons - not to move staff from a 40-hour working week to a standard 37-hour week in 2001, when this was introduced for the rest of the organization on foot of the national Single Status agreement. More recently, of course, the Single Status agreement negotiated by the council with the trades unions in 2007 identifies 37 hours as the agreed standard working week, and it is perfectly possible to cover the various premises on the basis of standard 37-hour shifts without the need for built-in overtime.

Now that the re-opening of the City Hall is imminent it is necessary, in line with the agreement made

with the trades unions in 2007, to finalise a package of operational and financial changes in order to regularise the position within the Security unit and bring its costs and operations – most notably in respect of overtime – under closer control.

A package of measures has therefore been developed and tabled with the trades unions in order to deal with the situation. In essence this package involves:

- the development of standard 37-hour per week shifts which contain no element of contractual or compulsory overtime (these shifts to be based on the principle of rotation around all premises and on the operation of a system of ‘pool’ cover for sickness and leave);
- the buyout of the contractual overtime element at the level agreed by the Committee as part of the Single Status agreement concluded with the trades unions corporately in 2007, i.e. three times the annual loss (approx. **£6,000** per person);
- the abolition of ‘compulsory’ overtime on Saturdays/Sundays;
- the development of modern, forward-looking job descriptions for Security Officers and Control Room Operatives, and the re-grading of these staff on the basis of the new job descriptions, which will also help to recompense them for the loss of regular ‘compulsory’ overtime (desk-top evaluations by BIS have already confirmed that the new job descriptions would support the necessary re-grading);
- the enhancement of the work/life balance of staff through the shortened working week and the removal of the ‘compulsory’ overtime requirement to work between 8 - 12 weekends per year;
- the payment of a one-off ‘transition payment’ of **£500** per person in recognition of the personal disruption and need for flexibility that will inevitably be required from staff during the period of transition (complicated still further by the re-opening of the City Hall) ; *and*
- an agreed permanent establishment of 30 Security Officers and 8 Control Room Operatives.

These proposed changes have been discussed with the full-time officials and local shop stewards involved. In addition, the shop stewards have been facilitated to meet with their members to explain the proposals, and a series of 5 briefing sessions were conducted by the Head of Facilities Management at which individual members of staff were invited to attend to hear the proposals first-hand and to ask questions, and over 70% of available staff attended. In addition, a dedicated edition of the ‘Security Bulletin’ was produced setting out the proposals and copies were distributed to all staff, including those on leave or sickness absence.

The total one-off cost of the ‘buyout’ of contractual overtime would be **£229,686**, and provision for such a buyout has been made in the unit’s revenue estimates for the current year. The year-on-year savings which would result from the implementation of the proposed changes during 2009 would be in the order of **£89,755** and the ‘pay-back’ period would therefore be just over 2½ years.

The proposed ‘transition’ payment of £500 per person would cost approx. **£19,000** in total and no revenue provision was made for this, however the post of Security Manager is currently vacant and will in all probability remain so until at least January 2010, and this releases approx. £30K of savings in the staffing budget from which this payment could be funded in the current year.

This payment reflects the operational difficulties involved in transferring staff from existing roster arrangements to the new arrangements, where it will be inevitable that some individuals will have to work back-to-back night shifts and/or weekends, will be working in new teams and will be required to be flexible at short notice during the decant and re-opening phase of the City Hall. It is anticipated that this settling-down period will be around 6 weeks, which means that the proposed payment would be worth around £85 per week for each individual.

It should be noted that the costs of doing nothing (i.e. simply allowing the continuation of unnecessary 40-hour working weeks based on paid breaks and the associated built-in contractual and ‘compulsory’ overtime etc.) would be approx. **£428,500** over the next 3 years.

The proposed changes have been discussed with the various trades unions on a number of occasions, and are now accepted by them as the best that can be achieved by negotiation in the circumstances.

It has been emphasized to the trades unions and staff that the proposals are only available as a package; we will not permit the 'cherry-picking' of the various provisions and it has been made clear that, if a package cannot be agreed, we will proceed to deal with each of the individual issues using the existing policies and mechanisms.

The trades unions therefore wish to conduct a secret ballot of the Security work-force on the proposals, but before this can occur the Committee must be willing to authorise the offer to be made by the council.

### **Key Issues**

In October 2006 this Committee decided that it wished to retain manned security cover at the existing range of premises and to do so on the basis of 24/7 cover where appropriate. It is therefore necessary to regularise the duties, rostering and pay of the staff concerned in order to provide a modern, flexible and well-regarded in-house security and CCTV monitoring service, and the proposals set out above are central to that effort.

The key issue is therefore whether or not the Committee is minded to act now to abolish the old inefficient and uneconomic working practices of the past, by making the one-off payments set out above. By so doing, the unit will be able to:-

1. buy out the old practices at no additional cost to the rate-payer (as these costs were foreseen and provided for in the current year's revenue estimates);
2. immediately begin to save in the order of **£90K** (more in the early years) per annum;
3. remove the reliance on costly but un-necessary built-in overtime;
4. provide an effective mechanism to manage the issue of cover for sickness and leave etc. though the implementation of 'pool' cover at normal time and with no additional costs; *and*
5. ensure that this last-remaining group of staff comply with the Single Status agreement as set out in the document of April 2007.

If the Committee is minded to endorse the proposed package of changes and to approve the making of a formal offer, a secret ballot will be conducted by each of the 3 trades unions involved as soon as possible thereafter. The results of these ballots will be reported back to the Committee for information.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

These proposals will involve an initial buyout totalling some £230K for which provision has been made in the current year, together with a further sum of £19K in respect of the 'transition' payment for which no provision has been made but which can be funded from other revenue savings. In the longer term this will mean savings of approx. £90K per year, with an initial pay-back period of just over 2½ years.

#### Human Resources

There are no direct HR implications arising from this report, as the staffing levels proposed are the same as the current levels so there are no potential redundancy considerations.

#### Assets

There are no direct asset implications arising from this report.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee endorses the package of proposals set out herein and authorises the Head of Facilities Management to make a formal offer to staff and trades unions on this basis.

It is also recommended that, if the outcome of the secret ballots is acceptance of the package, the Head of Facilities Management be authorised to proceed to implementation immediately.

**Decision Tracking**

The trades unions have indicated that, if the proposals are put to the Committee and accepted, they will hold a secret ballot immediately after full Council ratification on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009. The Head of Facilities Management will ensure that, in these circumstances, the new rates are paid in the first full fortnightly period thereafter and the buyout amounts paid in the next fortnightly period, and will report back the outcome of the ballots to the Committee for information in September 2009.

**Key to Abbreviations**

None.

**Documents Attached**

None.