



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Health & Environmental Services Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Building Control Service
<b>Date:</b>	4 November 2009
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	William Francey, Director of Health & Environmental Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Trevor Martin, Head of Building Control Ext: 2450

**Relevant Background Information**

At your meeting of 5 August 2009, you granted permission to the Head of Building Control to ask the Business Improvement Service (BIS) to undertake a structural review of the Service. This was because the global recession had precipitated a significant downturn in the construction industry and the subsequent loss of building regulation fee income to the Service.

As part of the Council's efficiency programme Building Control has reduced costs and created savings in the past few years in the region of £600K. This was through a number of measures, including reducing expenditure, not filling establishment posts, redeployment of staff to other areas of the Council and accessing additional income streams. This has made the realisation of further cost savings in areas other than staffing less achievable. As staff costs in Building Control account for 60% of overall costs it was considered reasonable to commission BIS to examine the Service's structure and the potential for a reduction in the number of posts to realise further savings. Committee supported the recommendation that a review be undertaken to determine how the Service could be 'right-sized' to reduce expenditure whilst sustaining the quality of service Building Control provide to its customers, the Council and the ratepayer.

Following the Committee decision in August 2009, the Service made initial enquiries with staff who would be willing to apply for voluntary redundancy and a number of staff (6 No) made themselves available should this option present itself. These include the Business Support Manager, Assistant Building Control Manager and four Building Control Surveyors. In considering whether these redundancies could be accommodated, whilst some are made possible due to decreases in workload, others would need some realignment of duties to enable those posts to be taken out of the current establishment.

Additionally, the Service had some anomalies in its structure that require to be regularised. One of these was the Business Support Assistant who was employed as a seconded post to carry out project work under the data sharing exercise with Land & Property Services. That project is now four years old and mainstreamed into the Service's workload with its accompanying income stream of £200K but needs to be made permanent.

The Service has also been sourcing additional work and a series of initiatives under areas such as the enforcement of Energy Performance Certification, the Fire Risk

Assessments, surveys for Council Departments and vacancy inspections for rating purposes will bring more opportunity to reduce expenditure.

This was the background under which BIS were commissioned to carry out the structural review.

### **Key Issues**

The Key issues are as follows:

- The Building Control Service has carried out all possible measures to reduce expenditure and the removal of posts is the next logical step.
- There has been a significant reduction in Building Control's income and the Service needs to factor that loss of consequent workload into its structure.
- 6 postholders have declared an interest in voluntary redundancy and the structure can be realigned to release them.
- The post of Business Support Assistant looking after the Land & Property Service duties needs to be permanently catered for but is self funded.

BIS have produced a comprehensive report (Appendix 1) for the Committee with recommendations at Section 4 together with the financial implications for the Council. The Trade Unions have been consulted at each stage and are satisfied with the recommendations of the report.

The outcomes take into account the future direction of business support functions and provide for the corporate efficiency agenda and will contribute to the goals set by the Budget & Transformation Panel.

We should be mindful however of the need to avoid an excessive or unnecessary loss of experienced personnel whereby the Service does not fulfil its statutory obligations and from which it cannot recover, if and when the recession ends.

### **Proposals**

BIS has developed the recommendations outlined below to address the key issues identified.

- Deletion of three Building Control Surveyor posts (PO4) due to the economic downturn – In the event of an economic recovery the Service can, under delegated authority, recruit additional posts if required provided there is an increase in income.
- Deletion of the one vacant Building Control Surveyor post (PO4). The Service has already factored this removal in current year estimates
- Deletion of one CAD Technician post (Scale 4). The Service has already factored this removal in current year estimates
- Deletion of one Building Control Surveyor post (PO4) from the Business Development unit. This is the post that currently carries out Customer Services/Relations and internal review work.
- Deletion of one Assistant Building Control Manager post (PO7)
- Deletion of the Business Support Manager post (PO5)
- Re-designation of the Assistant Business Managers (PO3), to carry out newly aligned functions and take on the strategic role vacated by the Business Support Manager

- Re-designation of the Technical Support Officer in the Business Development Unit to Training Support Officer (SO2)
- Creation of two Senior Business Support posts (SO2) to support operational delivery.
- Creation of four Business Support Assistants (Scale 5/6) to carry out the LPS work; to support the transfer of the Regulatory Services administration function; to support the diversification of work; to support the transfer of the customer function from Business Development; to help manage the transfer of the enforcement process; to support the Corporate Gazetteer and EPC projects, and, to carry out internal improvement work. (Three of these posts will be created by the reduction of 3 Clerk/WPO posts)
- Deletion of 3 Clerk/WPO posts

The immediate net impact of implementing these recommendations is an ongoing annual saving of **£181,307** with a **decrease of 5 posts** overall off the current establishment.

### Resource Implications

#### Financial

The implementation of the above recommendations will result in the following costs and savings;

Actuarial and Redundancy Costs (£)	Current Salary and Superannuation Savings (pa) (£)	Clawback Period
368,512	181,307	2 years

If these recommendations are accepted, savings of **£181,307** per annum after 2 years will be realised.

Benchmarking has identified that the clawback period is well below that used by other public sector organisations where a payback period of 3.25 years has been defined as acceptable.

#### Human Resources

Detailed consultation will now take place with all relevant stakeholders including HR, Trade Unions and staff to develop an implementation plan which is fully in accordance with all relevant HR policies and procedures. However Committee should note that all parties have been consulted throughout this process and are in agreement.

It is acknowledged that some postholders will be required to sign and agree amended job descriptions. In addition, a recruitment exercise will need to be undertaken for some new posts, as appropriate.

### Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note and endorse the BIS recommendations as listed above for the Building Control Service and is asked to agree that the proposals should be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

Members are asked that, should the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee approve the proposals and if no written objections are received, the Service can proceed directly to implementation stage without further referral back to committee.

<b>Decision Tracking</b>
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The person responsible for carrying out the decision is the Head of Building Control in conjunction with BIS and Human Resources.
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<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
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ISB – Information Services Belfast BIS – Business Improvement Section LPS – Land & Property Services
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<b>Documents Attached</b>
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BIS “Review of Building Control” (October 2009) Report
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