



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Programme - Update
Date:	7 October 2011
Reporting Officer:	Ciaran Quigley, Assistant Chief Executive Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects
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1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	Members are advised that during the past year local government have been working together to development a sector led 'Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE)' programme. The ICE programme seeks to identify potential collaborative opportunities to support service improvement and secure greater efficiencies within councils. As previously agreed by Committee, Council officers have been engaged in these discussions to explore the potential opportunities for the Council as part of its wider efficiency programme which has already recognised collaboration as one approach.
1.2	Although initially developed as a counter argument to the proposed establishment of a centralised Business Services Organisation to deliver a range of new functions which had been proposed to transfer to Local Government, the ICE programme seeks to reflect the vacuum created by the suspension of the RPA in June 2010, and the increasingly challenging financial environment facing councils. The stated aim of the programme is to reduce the financial burden on ratepayers and to make the Sector more efficient through identifying, sharing and implementing opportunities for improvement and efficiency via collaboration.
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	The exploratory work in relation to ICE cumulated in the release, in February 2011, of a 'Case for Change' document which sought to engage the sector in discussions on potential improvement opportunities. An Executive Summary of the ICE document is attached at Appendix 1 , with copies of the full report (266 pages) previously circulated to Members. The Council submitted a detailed response to this consultation document indicating its support for the principles which underpin the ICE programme and confirming its continued involvement insofar as there may be potential tangible benefits for the Council in doing so.
2.2	In July 2011, a consultation findings report was issued to all councils for information summarising the feedback received on the ICE Case for Change report (copy attached at Appendix 2), and setting out recommendations for moving the ICE programme forward including the establishment of a Regional Governance Group , a political forum, which would identify, consider and make recommendations to councils on potential collaborative opportunities.
2.3	Subsequently, the Chief Executive has recently received joint correspondence, dated 19 September, from the President of NILGA and Chair of SOLACE (attached at Appendix 3) setting out proposals for the establishment of such a Regional Governance Group including its proposed role, political membership, secretarial support, resource requirements and operating principles.
2.4	In reviewing the proposals put forward, Members are asked to consider the following key issues:- i) Membership of Regional Governance Group (RGG) – it is proposed that each Council is asked to nominate one political representative, and a substitute member, onto the RGG. If the Council was to consider that it should participate on the RGG it is proposed that the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be nominated to represent the Council, with the Deputy Chair as the substitute nomination. ii) Resource Implications – The report indicates that the only costs to be met by councils as a result of their participation on the RGG will be those relating to expenses incurred (e.g. travel to meetings) by the RGG nominated Member and the potential costs associated with hosting meetings (which are proposed to be rotated across member councils). The report further states that councils will be consulted upon any potential additional costs which may be incurred by participating councils and such costs will be estimated in advance by a business case.

2.5 Whilst there clearly remains uncertainty around the scope of potential opportunity for the Council as part of the ICE Programme, the current financial pressures facing the local government and wider public sector will undoubtedly act as a compelling driver for encouraging greater collaboration where real benefits, greater value for money and efficiencies can be demonstrated at no detriment to councils.

3.0 Resource Implications

There will clearly be staffing implications attached to the Council's continued participation in the ICE programme, albeit the level of resources has yet to be quantified.

There will also be financial costs attached to payment of Members expenses for participation on the RGG and hosting meetings as required.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i) consider the proposals for the establishment of a Regional Governance Group (as set out in paragraph 2.4 above and the correspondence attached at Appendix 3; and
- ii) agree that the Chair of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be the nomination onto the Regional Governance Group, with the Deputy Chair nominated as substitute.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 Executive Summary of ICE Case for Change report

Appendix 2 ICE Case for Change consultation findings report

Appendix 3 Correspondence received regarding the establishment of the RGG