



Belfast City Council

Report to	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Meetings and Other Commitments for Members in June
Date:	25th April, 2014
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (Ext 6314)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that the Committee, at its meeting on 4th June, agreed that the existing 6 Standing Committees should be reappointed at the Annual Council meeting on 2nd June for the remainder of the term of office of the Council, which will end on 31st March, 2015.
1.2	Members will also be aware that the Statutory Transition Committee has recommended to the incoming Shadow Council that it appoint 4 Committees in the first instance to take forward the work of planning to take over the administration of the City, with significant additional responsibilities, from 1st April 2015.
1.3	There will also be an urgent need to undertake induction training for incoming Members of the Shadow Council and to undertake training for all Members of both the existing Belfast City Council and the Shadow Council on the new Code of Conduct for Members, as this will apply to Members of both Councils from 25th May, 2014.
1.4	This workload will have significant implications for Members' time in June, and particularly for those Members who hold a position on both Councils.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Attached at Appendix 1 is a schedule of Committee and other meetings of the existing Council for the period from 25th May till 4th July.
2.1	Members are asked to give consideration to the following issues:

2.2 Induction Training Requirements

Incoming Members of the Shadow Council will require to undergo initial induction training and will be required to have a number of logistical matters attended to (bank details, security passes, car park passes etc) in the days immediately following their election. All Members of the Shadow Council officially take up office on Sunday, 25th May. Monday 26th May is a Bank Holiday so this initial engagement will need to take place on Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th May.

2.3 Code of Conduct Training

The new Code of Conduct for Members (which is still being consulted upon) will apply to Members of both the existing Belfast City Council and the Shadow Council and therefore it is essential that early awareness training is undertaken so that Members do not inadvertently fall foul of the Code. The Local Government Training Group will be advertising in the week beginning 28th April for training providers to deliver this training across the 11 new Councils. It is envisaged that the training provider selected will deliver the training in partnership with the Ombudsman's Office, which will be responsible for the investigation of any alleged breaches of the Code. No doubt all of the 11 new Councils will be seeking to identify early training dates for this training and our Human Resources Section have already stressed the need for the training to be delivered in Belfast before the first meeting of the Shadow Council on 11th June.

2.4 Engagement with Party Leaders

It will be important that the political parties in the Shadow Council appoint party leaders as soon as possible after the elections and no later than 29th May. A number of meetings of the party leaders will be required to identify if there is common agreement as to the method of proportionality to be applied to the appointment of positions of responsibility and to actually run the agreed process so that a report can be prepared for agreement by the Shadow Council on 11th June. Officers can provide the party leaders with options for consideration for the method of proportionality and the outcome of those methods to a variety of Committee sizes. However, this work cannot be undertaken until after the election results are known. Therefore, the meetings of party leaders will need to take place between 29th May and 3rd June so that the appropriate papers can be circulated at least 5 days prior to the meeting date of 11th June – as required under the provisions of the Local Government Bill.

In addition to this, it will be necessary to seek a meeting of the party leaders of the parties in the existing Council to run the D'hondt exercise for the appointment of Members to Committees for the remainder of the Council Term. This needs to be agreed in advance of the Annual Council meeting on 2nd June and would, ideally take place prior to the local elections on 22nd May. Members will recall that in February 2013 it was agreed that, as there had been a change in the party strengths on the Council with Alderman McCoubrey joining the Democratic Unionist Party in November 2012, that the remaining 2 years of the Term would be considered as two 1-year terms with Sinn Fein having 38 Members across the Committees for the 2013/14 year and the DUP 37 seats with that position being reversed for the 2014/15 year.

2.5	<p><u>Meetings of Committees and Working Groups</u></p> <p>Members will recall that the Committee agreed on 4th April that the existing 6 Standing Committees would be reappointed at the Annual Council Meeting on 2nd June and that a review of the existing Working Groups should be carried out to assess which should be reappointed for the remainder of the Council Term.</p> <p>The attached schedule shows the Standing Committees meeting on their existing scheduled days. It also shows indicative meeting dates of the 5 Area-Based Working Groups and of the Good Relations Partnership and the Audit Panel. The meeting of the Audit Panel will be required in order to consider the draft Annual Financial Report including the Annual Governance Statement for recommendation for approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th June. The Good Relations Partnership, which includes outside Members, will be required to meet to consider issues in relation to Peace 3 funding and potentially matters concerning the Bonfire Programme over the Summer.</p> <p>Members are asked to give consideration as to whether it is essential that the Area-Based Working Groups meet during June or whether it would be appropriate for any decisions required to be taken directly to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that month. In that way, some dates would be kept free to allow the other matters requiring urgent attention to be dealt with.</p>
2.6	<p><u>Meetings of Committees of the Shadow Council</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Statutory Transition Committee has recommended to the incoming Shadow Council that it appoint 4 Committees in the first instance to take forward the work of planning to take over the administration of the City, with significant additional responsibilities, from 1st April 2015. These Committees will need to meet during the month of June and, in order to allow the minutes to be circulated 5 days in advance of the next meeting of the Shadow Council in early July, the meetings will need to be held between 16th and 24th June approximately.</p>
2.7	<p><u>Party Group Briefings</u></p> <p>The attached schedule shows the agreed dates for Party Group Briefings during June. Again, given the number of meetings and other important issues to be addressed by Members during that month, it is suggested that the briefings are cancelled for that month.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	None.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	None.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the contents of the report; 2. Note that induction training for new Members will take place as early as possible after the elections and indicatively on 28th and 29th May; 3. Note that Human Resources will liaise with the Local Government Training Group to attempt to establish early dates for training on the new Code of Conduct and ideally before 11th June; 4. Agree that a meeting of the Party Leaders in the existing Council will take place prior to the local elections on 22nd May to run the D'hondt process for the appointment of Committees for the 2014/15 year; 5. Agree that a meeting or series of meetings will be held with the Party Leaders of the Parties in the Shadow Council between 29th May and 3rd June to consider the allocation of Committee places and positions of responsibility in the Shadow Council; 6. Agree to reappoint the membership of the Audit Panel and the Good Relations Partnership in order that they might hold essential meetings in June with the reappointment of all other Working Groups to be considered as part of an overall report to Committee in August; 7. Note that the first meetings of the 4 Committees to be appointed by the Shadow Council on 11th June will need to take place between 16th and 24th June approximately. 8. Agree that the existing Area-Based Working Group meetings be postponed for June and any decisions required being reported directly to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and 9. Agree to cancel the Party Group Briefings scheduled for June.

6	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 – Draft schedule of meetings from 25th May to 4th July	