

# Public Document Pack

**Committee and Members' Services Section  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Adelaide Exchange  
24-26 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8GD**



14<sup>th</sup> April, 2008

## **MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Dear Councillor

The above-named Committee will meet in the Council Chamber, 3rd Floor, Adelaide Exchange on Friday, 18th April, 2008 at 10.00 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully

PETER McNANEY

Chief Executive

### **AGENDA:**

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes

2. Modernisation and Improvement

- (a) Review of Public Administration - Update
- (b) Northern Ireland Local Government Association - Update (Pages 1 - 2)
- (c) Northern Ireland Assembly Liaison (Pages 3 - 6)
- (d) Communications Review - Annual report (Pages 7 - 18)
- (e) Strategic Policy and Resources Committees Work Plan (Pages 19 - 24)

3. Corporate Plan and Performance Management

- (a) Strategy 2008-2011: Update on Progress (Pages 25 - 26)
- (b) Financial Planning Cycle Update (Pages 27 - 28)

- (c) Strategic Human Resources Management Framework (Pages 29 - 34)
- 4. Democratic Services and Governance
  - (a) Requests for the Provision of Hospitality (Pages 35 - 38)
- 5. Finance
  - (a) Minutes of Meeting of Audit Panel and Annual Governance Statement 2007/08 (Pages 39 - 52)
  - (b) Titanic Signature Project (Pages 53 - 54)
- 6. Human Resources
  - (a) Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives (Pages 55 - 56)
- 7. Asset Management
  - (a) Lands at Hannahstown Hill (Pages 57 - 58)
  - (b) Growing the Rates Base - The Future Importance of Tall Buildings in Belfast (Pages 59 - 68)
  - (c) Gasworks Estate (Pages 69 - 74)
- 8. Capital Programme: Blythefield Open Space - Changing Accommodation and Multi Use Games Area (Pages 75 - 78)
  - (a) City Hall Grounds Tours - Pilot Implementation (Pages 79 - 82)
- 9. Good Relations and Equality
  - (a) Minutes of Meeting of Good Relations Steering Panel (Pages 83 - 88)
- 10. Cross-Cutting Issues
  - (a) Post Office Consultation (Pages 89 - 94)



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Northern Ireland Local Government Association - Update
<b>Date:</b>	Friday, 18 <sup>th</sup> April, 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kevin Heaney (ext 6202)

<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>Relevant background information</u></b>
1.1	Members will be aware of the ongoing discussions within the Committee over recent months with regard to the Council's relationship with and engagement within the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the concerns of Members in terms of the level of capacity within the Association, the subscription contributions sought from the Council, the value for money received and the lack of representation on NILGA's Executive Committee.
1.2	Members will recall that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 25 <sup>th</sup> January, 2008, had agreed that representatives of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) be requested to meet with an all party deputation consisting of the Chairman of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and Party Group Leaders to discuss the series of issues previously raised by Members with regard to the Council's continued engagement and funding of NILGA and explore the type of changes necessary in order to enable NILGA to represent and promote effectively the views and interests of the local government sector.
<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>KEY ISSUES</u></b>
2.1	Members will note that the Council is currently withholding 50% (£42,110) of its annual subscription to NILGA for the period 2007/2008 with payment only being made on the basis of NILGA clearly demonstrating that it has taken adequate actions to address the concerns previously raised by the Council.
2.2	Furthermore, NILGA has recently written to the Council proposing a 14.6% increase in its annual subscription income from Councils which would increase from £369.5K to £423.5K.
2.3	In terms of Belfast, the proposed subscription contribution for the period 2008/2009 is £104,324. This equates to 25% of NILGA's total subscription income and an 11% increase on the Council's subscription charge for the previous year.
2.4	Officers have been in discussions with NILGA officials over recent months to examine the concerns and issues raised by Members with the view to NILGA taking proactive steps to addressing them.
2.5	Whilst NILGA has made some progress in the majority of areas identified by the Council for improvement, the main outstanding issues are the reconfiguration of its governance arrangements, the representation of Belfast City Council on the Association and the annual subscription charges.
2.6	Members will note that a productive and positive meeting had taken place on 3 <sup>rd</sup> April between NILGA Office Bearers and an All-Party deputation from the Council. The two key issues discussed included:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Representation</b> - the current process for nominating Members to NILGA's Executive (via a Party Nominating Officer) and the Council's current lack of representation on the Executive</li> <li>2. <b>Value for money</b> - what added benefit does the Council get for the contribution it makes to NILGA?</li> </ul>

- 2.6 In terms of next steps, it was agreed that NILGA, in liaison with Council officials, would prepare a paper considering possible interim arrangements, leading up to reconfiguration of the Local Government sector resulting from the RPA, which would enable greater Council representation on the Executive Board of NILGA (i.e. representation could be based on population catchments which would mean that the Council would be given 15% of places on NILGA's Executive as apposed to 11% as is the current case). It was agreed also that NILGA would prepare a paper outlining the added value provided by NILGA to the Council for its substantial contribution to the association.
- 2.7 Whilst accepting that the scheduling of NILGA meetings, in some instances, conflicts with Council Committee meetings and recognising the time pressures placed upon elected Members, concern had been raised by NILGA's Office Bearers regarding the current levels of engagement and attendance of the Council's representatives on NILGA and the need for further consideration to be given to how this could be addressed.
- 2.8 A more detailed report addressing the aforementioned issues will be brought to the Committee for consideration at its meeting in May, 2008.

### **3.0 Resource Implications**

#### Financial and Human Resources

There are no Financial or Human Resource implications contained within this report.

### **4.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and, in particular, that a further detailed report will be brought to the Committee in May, 2008.



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	NI Assembly liaison/update
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Maeve-ann Higgins, Assistant Policy & Performance Analyst (ext 6205)

**Relevant Background Information**

This report is being brought on a monthly basis to Strategic P&R as agreed at August 2007 meeting. It provides contact and update information on the work of the Assembly to assist Members liaise with, and influence the work of, the Assembly and ensure that the interests of the city of Belfast are most effectively represented.

**Key Issues**

**1. Belfast City Council guide to the Assembly**

An updated version of this guide is available on the Members' portal.

**2. Official liaison with the Assembly**

In order to ensure that the Council is aligned in its approach and liaison with the Assembly, it was agreed that Assembly/Ministerial updates are added as a standing item to the agenda of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the appropriate Committees of the Council.

**3. Update on Assembly business**

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) announcements

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, Environment Minister Arlene Foster made a statement to the Assembly outlining the Executive's vision for local government. The full Minister's Statement can be viewed on the DOE website ([www.doeni.gov.uk](http://www.doeni.gov.uk)). In her speech she stated that new councils will have a new Power of Well Being, a Community Planning Duty and new governance arrangements which will all be set out in statute.

The current 26 council areas will be rationalised to create 11 new council areas.

The Minister outlined that the functions to transfer to local government include:

- Local development plan functions, development control and enforcement;
- Local public realm aspects of road functions including streetscaping; town and city centre environmental improvements; street lighting; off-street parking; permitting local events to be held on roads etc;
- Urban regeneration and community development delivery functions including those associated with physical development, area based regeneration (such as Neighbourhood Renewal) along with some community development
- programmes and support for the voluntary and community sectors;
- A range of housing functions;
- A number of functions associated with driving forward local economic

development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

### Budget Bill - 31<sup>st</sup> March

The Budget Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 became law on 12 March 2008.

### Varney Review

On 31<sup>st</sup> March the assembly expressed its deep concern at the conclusions of Sir David Varney's Review of Tax policy in Northern Ireland; maintains that it is flawed in not sufficiently recognising the particular economic and geographical circumstances of this region; and calls on the Executive to bring forward a detailed Regional Economic Strategy that will address the economic and financial dependency of Northern Ireland, and facilitate a step-change in the Northern Ireland economy, in terms of closing the productivity gap with the rest of the United Kingdom.

### Older People's Commissioner

Following on from the announcement on 18<sup>th</sup> December OFMDFM will create a Northern Ireland Commissioner for Older People, three consultation events are currently being organised, one in Cookstown and two further events in Belfast and Londonderry to assist in developing proposals for the specific remit of the Office. A report is to be presented to OFMDFM shortly.

### Multi-Sports Stadium

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure on 7<sup>th</sup> March stated that the Outline Business Case on the Multi-Sports Stadium is currently with the Department of Finance and Personnel for scrutiny and, if approved, will then be submitted, as part of the overall Maze/Long Kesh proposal, to the Executive for consideration.

### Titanic Signature Project

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is continuing to work with Titanic Quarter Limited and the Belfast Harbour Commissioners to identify potential funding sources for the construction and completion of the Titanic Signature Project by 2012. In light of the elapse of time, the project will be subject to an updated economic appraisal.

### Neighbourhood Renewal

The Department for Social Development's spending plans for Neighbourhood Renewal Areas for the period from 2008 - 2011 will be finalised on a rolling financial year basis. Spending commitments for the new Comprehensive Spending Review period will be based on a combination of factors including the prioritisation of competing demands for funding, the rate at which projects in receipt of commitments of funding progress and the potential availability of additional resources that may be secured as part of in-year funding bids. As plans are drawn together there will be an opportunity to make longer term commitments of Neighbourhood Renewal funds to some projects over the three year funding window and scope to bring planned schemes and projects forward as resources permit.

### Community Safety Partnerships - Investment

The Government is to invest over £9.5 million to strengthen and support local communities in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

Criminal Justice Minister Paul Goggins unveiled on 6<sup>th</sup> March the financial package as he addressed representatives from all 26 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) at an event in Newcastle.

The three year funding package will assist in the delivery of front line projects that will identify and deliver local solutions to local problems and contribute to strategic priorities with a particular focus on anti-social behaviour and violent crime.

### Policing and Criminal Justice

On the 11<sup>th</sup> March the Assembly approved the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee relating to the devolution of policing and justice matters, and agreed that, as required by section 18 of the Northern Ireland (St. Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, it should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, before 27 March 2008, as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) is conducting a broad inquiry into the administration of policing and the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. The first phase of this inquiry will focus on two specific areas of current concern:

- The financial and operational consequences for the PSNI of servicing the various 'historic inquiries' into past events in Northern Ireland; and
- The effect on the ability of the Police Service Northern Ireland to bring accused persons to trial of provisions in the Inquiries Act 2005 and in other legislation requiring the police to divulge information which might identify a covert source.

### Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April the Second Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill (NIA 12/07) was agreed.

### Combating Underage Drinking

On 1<sup>st</sup> April the Assembly expressed concern at the levels of underage drinking and calls on the Executive's Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to bring urgently before the Assembly proposals to combat underage drinking.

### Bin Tax Pilot

Minister of the Environment has no plans to introduce a 'Bin-Tax' pilot scheme in Northern Ireland.

### Traffic Congestion

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) proposes a programme of up to 14 Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) focused on Belfast. In addition to those implemented to date, bus lanes are planned for the Lisburn Road, Malone Road and Saintfield Road corridors in South Belfast. An additional 800 metres of bus lane on the Ormeau Road is planned for implementation by the end of March 2008 and Selective Vehicle Detection, which detects late buses and adjusts the signal timings to assist them, is being provided at all the traffic signals in South Belfast. Several other measures are outlined in the plan.

Light Rail System

The Department for Regional Development commissioned a feasibility study for Rapid Transit for Belfast. The scope of this study included determining the best system in terms of technology (either light rail or bus rapid transit), routes and costs. The study also explored how any system should be funded, including the scope for developer contributions from the private sector. The Minister is reviewing the study findings and will be discussing it with the Regional Development Committee and Executive shortly.

First Minister

The Reverend Ian Paisley MP MLA announced this month that he will now be stepping down as First Minister and DUP Party Leader.

**Resource Implications**

Financial

No financial implications

Human Resources

No HR implications

Asset and Other Implications

No asset or other implications

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the above report.

**Key to Abbreviations**

N/A

**Documents Attached**

N/A





### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Communication review – annual report
<b>Date:</b>	18 April, 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Eamon Deeny
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	2263

#### Relevant Background Information

Following the review of communications, it was agreed that an annual progress report be submitted to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. This report covers the period April 2007 – March 2008. Significant progress has been made in a number of areas but a number of challenges still lie ahead. This progress report summarises progress to date on our various areas of responsibility.

#### Key Issues

The report provides an update in the following areas:

- Efficiencies
- Corporate identity policy
- Publications/City Matters
- Graphic Design
- Website
- Media relations
- Internal communications
- Advertising

Highlights of the report include:

- The introduction of a publication policy together with the appointment of an in-house graphic designer has resulted in savings in excess of £200,000 in the current financial year.
- The decision by the council to meet the cost of City Matters by selling advertising is saving the council £140,000 per year. .
- The recommendations of the review of advertising, approved by council at its meeting on 1 April, is expected to result in savings of between £250,000 and £450,000 following the appointment of an advertising manager, whose role will be to develop an advertising policy. Its purpose will be to develop a corporate

advertising policy to reduce spending and identify revenue streams and improve use of advertising as a communications tool.

- Consideration needs to be given to increasing the size of our graphic design team with the potential to realise further savings of around £200,000.
- Belfast City Council's website is now rated consistently in the top 20 of local authority websites across the UK.
- The website, City Matters and the anti-litter publicity campaign have won awards or been shortlisted for a variety of prestigious communications awards, which enhances the reputation and image of the council.
- Consideration to be given by members of using a portion of the savings made through the advertising review to identify and develop new communication technologies and techniques to get information to hard to reach groups.
- Around 2,000 press queries were received and about 400 press releases issued during the past year. Around 95 per cent of all press queries were responded to within a day.
- An internal communications plan is being finalised to ensure that information on the corporate plan, the Review of Public Administration and other information relevant to staff, such as the Human Resources Strategy, is disseminated throughout the organisation in a timely and effective way
- It was agreed that at the time of the approval of the Review of Communications two years ago that an independent assessment be carried out to consider the effectiveness of the implementation and consider further improvements to be made to service to members and departments and efficiencies.

**Resource Implications**

A yet to be determined sum of money, not greater than £15,000 to be set aside for the independent review.

**Recommendations**

Members note the considerable progress that is being made in communications and the challenges that lie ahead.

Members to approve an independent assessment of the Review of Communications with recommendations on how to release further efficiency savings and development of proposals for a communication framework to support the delivery of the new Corporate Plan.

**Key to Abbreviations**

**Documents Attached**

Communications Review – annual report April 2007 – March 2008

## **CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS Annual Review April 2007 – March 2008**

### **Background**

Following the review of communications two years ago, it was agreed that reports be submitted to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the implementation of the communication review recommendations and other communications activity. The committee received a report in September on the first six months of the year. This report is a review of the past year and sets out the challenges of the year ahead. Considerable progress continues to be made on all fronts.

### **Efficiencies**

- The introduction of a Strategic Approach to Publications policy, following on from the appointment of an in-house graphic designer, has resulted in savings of more than £200,000 per year.
- The decision by council to approve the self financing of City Matters by accepting advertising is saving the council £140,000 per year, while producing the A-Z of services, due to be published in June, in the same way will save around £35,000.
- The implementation of the review of advertising, aimed at developing a council-wide advertising policy with the focus on efficiency and effectiveness, is expected to realise savings for the council of between £250k and £450k
- A further investment in our graphic design service would result in savings of between £100k and £200k, depending on whether we deployed a further one or two graphic designers.

### **Publications and new media**

#### **1.1 Corporate Identity Policy**

The corporate identity guidelines, which were introduced as policy in February 2007 have been updated and are available on the intranet and website. In the last year, we have strengthened our brand by providing clear guidelines both internally and externally.

We need to consider the introduction of the new Belfast brand and how we work with it.

In the longer term, we need to consider whether or not it would be appropriate to introduce a new Belfast City Council brand with the anticipated emergence of a new organisation with additional powers covering possibly a larger geographical area as a result of the Review of Public Administration. That is an issue we will ask the committee to consider sometime in the future.

#### **1.2 Writing style guide**

We are reinforcing our 'one council approach' by producing an online writing style guide, with the aim of achieving commonality of terminology and grammar. We aim to make this available in June 2008.

## 1.3 City Matters

Policy and Resources Committee agreed to using advertising to cover the costs of producing and distributing City Matters on a permanent basis (at a saving to the ratepayer of £138,400 on the next financial year). This follows the success of the pilot scheme for the December 2007 and March 2008 editions. The two year tender has been awarded to BPC Magazines.

The pilot exercise was restricted to public sector advertising, but committee agreed on 14 December, that we can seek advertising from private sector companies as long as their activities are in line with council priorities or have a public sector focus.

As part of the BPC contract, City Matters will be delivered as addressed mail (to the occupier) through Royal Mail. We aim for a delivery standard of at least 85% of all residents. This is supported by copies being sent to public areas, like libraries and surgery waiting rooms.

The spring 2008 edition was packaged in plastic but we are currently looking into environmentally-friendly options such as:

- biodegradable plastic, and
- tabbing (where the address is printed onto the back cover and the magazine is sealed with a recyclable sticker).

City Matters has ABC registration status (approved in January 2008) which confirms the circulation of the publication for potential advertisers.

City Matters was awarded Silver at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Awards for Best Newsletter.

### **Future work:**

- City Matters to be increased to six editions per year in 2009.
- As a result, departments and sections to make more use City Matters to promote their activities and further reduce the number of departmental publications.
- Departments are encouraged to support City Matters in advertising, instead of using less targeted publications, newspapers and billboards.
- Move towards the development of City Matters as a public service magazine in conjunction with other public service providers, with the possibility of increasing revenue for the council.

## 1.4 A-Z directory of council services

An A-Z directory of council services will be published in June and distributed with City Matters. This is an annual publication, which will also be paid for through advertising at no cost.

## 1.5 Graphic Design

A total of 400 graphic design jobs were carried out on behalf of the council in the past year. A total of 120 were dealt with by our in-house graphic designer and would have cost £100,000 if they had been outsourced. As the graphic designer is only working on 30 per cent of this work, it is clear that further substantial savings could be achieved by strengthening that part of our service.

Due to changes in our financial procedures with the introduction of SAP, we only have figures for the past six months. The spend for the six month period on graphic design alone is around £140,000 and that figure can be doubled for the year to almost £300,000. The deployment of a second graphic designer would ensure further efficiencies for the council in the region of another £100,000 while two graphic designers would save us up to £200,000 per year.

We currently send 70 per cent of our design jobs to outside agencies, who charge on average £55 per hour.

Examples of what it costs to use an external designer are:

- Giant's Park - £8,230 (creative concept and artwork for entire promotional campaign).
- World Trade Centre - £5,587.50 (logo, brochure, eshot, stationery)
- New design for the Belfast Zoo - £30,000 (logo, style guide, signage, stationery and web design)
- Boost design costs (2007-08) £10,380.75

These are only a few of the projects which were sent out to design agencies. Even by bringing these four in-house by employing an additional graphic designer would realise further efficiency savings.

The advantages of having in-house designers are not only financial, but gives us greater control of our corporate identity.

Our designer currently looks for the most competitive print contracts on a job by job basis. It is our intention to set up a select list of both designers and printers before March 2009. This will allow us to negotiate more efficient contracts and reduce the number of suppliers we currently use.

## 1.6 Website

More than 1 million people visited the website in 2007. It currently attracts a quarter of all council website traffic in Northern Ireland (source: SOCITM Better Connected 2008). In March 2008, over 200,000 people visited the site - a 185% increase from March 2007.

This increase is due to better maintenance, better usability and better integration with other communication tools, for example, using the web

address in press releases and in City Matters.

The Better Connected report 2008 (by SOCITM, Society of IT Managers) graded the website as 'transactional', an improvement on 2007's 'standard' ranking. We are the only council in Northern Ireland to achieve this grade.

The site was highlighted as an example of best or good practice in four categories:

- newsworthiness,
- resilience or security,
- use of plain English and
- visitor usage.

The monthly Site Morse reports assess the site for accessibility, function, performance and code quality. Our site was ranked 16 out of 463 UK local government websites in March 2008 and reached the top ten in November 2007. It achieved a silver award at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Awards in 2007 in the 'best website' category.

### **1.6.1 Current projects**

- Main priority - continued improvement of main council website
- An improved minutes system will be added in April 2008 (ModernGov), making it easier for people to find out about councillors and decisions taken by the council.
- Developing online payment facility that will allow people to buy their bins online.
- New websites
  - (1) Belfast Waterfront site was launched in November 2007 - a ticketing system, allowing people to buy tickets online, will follow in April 2008.
  - (2) Belfast Zoo website which will launch in summer 2008 and feature videos, audio tracks and an online shop.
  - (3) Grove Wellbeing Centre is currently being developed and will launch in April 2008.

### **1.6.2 Future projects**

#### (1) Content Management System

This system, which will give control of website content to departmental representatives, has been procured by ISB has been selected. Corporate Communications need to develop a training plan, to enable them to devolve content publishing to the departments. The system should be implemented in summer 2008.

#### (2) New website development

- Ulster Hall,
- Malone House and
- Belfast Castle

### (3) Partnerships website development

- Tall Ships,
- Belfast Community Safety Partnership
- Get Home Safe.

Decisions are needed on who is responsible for these sites.

### (4) More customer interaction

This includes adding more online forms (for example, booking a sports pitch or applying for a job) and payment facilities (buying a dog licence or organising a bulky waste collection).

#### **Website promotion**

We need to promote the services we provide online and encourage more people to interact with the council via the website. We are making significant strides already but more has to be done as the public survey suggested that only around 10 per cent of our ratepayer use the site. However, our own survey of those who visit the website would suggest of the 200,000 unique visitors last month, 60 per cent of them were residents of Belfast – the rest being people who used to live in the city but now live abroad, tourists and others with a range of interests in Belfast.

However, we need to increase awareness of the site and increase access to services on-line and we will now focus on promoting the website as a source of jobs and information on council and consider other ways of attracting visitors to the site.

#### **1.7 New media and technologies (see Appendix 2)**

There has been an increase in requests from departments for:

- email marketing,
- podcasts and
- blogs
- texting
- Social networking and for using websites like MySpace and YouTube.
- and other new channels of communications, like touchscreens.

We also receive proposals from organisations proposing initiatives big screen advertising in various location in the city and from local government television channels. The number of new initiatives will continue as communications is one of the fastest moving in terms of technology and we need to be in a position to consider taking advantage of any opportunities that will improve our communications effort.

We are currently researching the pros (new ways of communicating with ratepayers, saving money and paper) and cons (resourcing and inability to have full control of the council's image and reputation) of using these technologies and will be bringing a report to committee in the near future.

We will be proposing that a portion of the efficiencies that will be achieved, through the advertising review and possibly further graphic design activity in-house, should be directed towards developing new communications channels particularly to get information to hard-to-reach groups.

## **Media Relations**

### **1.1 Proactive media**

Media Relations Officers are assigned to departments and attend monthly committee meetings. This has resulted in a more proactive approach to media relations and there have significant improvements in the coverage of the council's work and activities.

### **1.2 Media evaluation**

We are in the process of introducing a new system into the section to enable us to provide more detailed information to members of coverage and that will happen in the current year. In the meantime, a snapshot of media coverage taken over a two week period recently showed that around 70 per cent of coverage on the council in the media is positive which contributes to a more positive image and improves our reputation.

In terms of the work of the section during the period, we issued more than 400 press releases and dealt with almost 2,000 media enquiries.

The following percentage figures relate to the number of press enquiries responded to within one working day:

Development – 95%  
Health & Environmental – 90%  
Parks & Leisure – 90%

### **1.3 Media Issues**

Most departments are currently finalising their plans for 2008/9 and when completed these will provide a clearer picture of the media requirements for the incoming year. In the meantime, a number of major current issues and campaigns continue to be regularly highlighted in the media and responses issued as and when appropriate.

These include:

- anti-social behaviour projects,
- development of Grove well Being Centre,
- waste management and anti-litter initiatives,
- recycling provision,
- regeneration and development of the evening economy,
- parks management plans.



Longer term it will be necessary to focus on major corporate issues and have plans to deal with the less positive implications of issues such as:

- the development of the North Foreshore,
- stadium proposal,
- local area working,
- older people's initiatives
- community planning,
- safer city strategy,
- city cemetery provision

### **1.4 Members/Spokespersons**

In the promotion and support of council activities, the rule of political primacy applies and will members will be the main spokespersons of the council. On occasions that the media specifically ask for an officer to deal with detailed operational queries or when a member is unavailable, permission will be sought from the committee chairs for officers to do interviews.

### **1.5 Improved services for members**

We are currently considering ways in which we can improve services for members in terms of media relations, especially through the use of new technology. In consultation with members, we will consider the following:

- a dedicated site on the intranet with links to daily council news digests.
- up to date news releases, current issues documents and relevant stories from the media, together with 'lines to take'.
- use of e mail alerts or text messaging to draw members' attention to relevant news issues or breaking stories referring them to an online facility such as one of those above and/or an officer contact number for more information.

### **1.6 Improved services for the media**

During the past year, we have improved on-line services on our website for the media, including the introduction of:

- online news facility, updated twice daily, publishes all press releases issued by the council, together with supporting photographs for press use.
- RSS feeds, which deliver news updates to journalists each time the website is updated.

We are currently considering a number of further developments which could be implemented, to provide a more detailed service, or 'Media Centre', including:

- Notice of forthcoming events, such as council meetings, press launches, public events;
- A more comprehensive photographic library, featuring council buildings and services, Belfast landmarks, members, council events, etc.;

- More detailed information on members – e.g. biographies, contact telephone numbers;
- An interactive facility for journalists to contact the media relations office directly from the website, to request further information, interviews with members, etc.

## **Internal Communications**

Progress is now being made towards improving internal communications across the organisation. Scoping work is now complete and action plan is now being finalised with initiatives to take us through the short and medium term. The main issues that will have to be communicated throughout the organisation will be in relation to the Corporate Plan, the Review of Public Administration and the Human Resources Strategy.

### **1.1 Internal communications plan**

An internal communications plan that is being developed will take into account the current issues facing the council including the external forces, internal issues, organisational culture, results of the employee satisfaction survey and feedback from employees. Together this information provides the backdrop and context for the recommended communications framework and channels that need to be introduced to improve communication with employees. The paper will also set out the key messages and major communication themes that will be used to inform employees about the strategic direction that the council is taking to shape, develop and manage the city, what this means for employees and the role they will play.

### **Communication channels**

While the internal communications plan is being developed the existing communication channels are being reviewed and improved. These include:

- The staff newsletter Intercom, which has now been increased to six times per year..
- The monthly core brief which reinforces business messages and provides staff with relevant corporate information.
- Staff are kept informed of council decisions that are relevant to them through an ebulletin which is sent out the day following the monthly council meeting.

### **Belnet**

Work is underway to provide staff with an improved intranet as the current Belnet is out of date and is difficult to navigate and as a result is not highly regarded by staff or members. A mini review was held in February to check that the system would provide the correct information for employees, the information architecture has been prepared and content is being written. The internal communications manager is working with ISB to finalise a launch date that will tie with the pilot 'getting people connected' project where four council sites across the city are to get PCs and computer training is to be provided for staff.

## **Advertising**

A review of advertising has been carried out and was approved by the council at its meeting on 1 April. The first step will be to appoint an Advertising Manager who will implement the recommendations that will result in efficiencies of between £250k and £450k through a reduction in advertising spend and an increase in revenue by maximising our assets, such as vehicles, facilities and publication, as places to advertise.

## **Conclusion**

At the time of the review of communications, it was agreed that independent analysis of the review should be conducted two years down the line. It is proposed that review could be conducted now, with a view to:

- Assessing the return on the council's investment in communications two years ago and the performance of the Corporate Communications section;
- Identify areas to improve communications on behalf of the council, improve services to members and departments and consider further opportunities for making efficiencies.

**Members/Officers Working Group**

The Strategic Communications Group, with each of the political parties represented, has been set up and the first meeting has been held. The group will oversee strategic developments and consider a range of issues such as the recommendations of the review of advertising, the future development of City Matters, corporate identity issues, web developments, role of members in communications, internal communications with members, public and media access to council meetings. The group will also consider the image and reputation of the council, which is one of the priorities listed in the Value Creation Map.



### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Work Plan</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18 April 2008</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	<b>Peter McNaney, Chief Executive</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Peter McNaney, Chief Executive</b>

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present a forward work plan for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the period April – June 2008.

#### **Relevant Background Information**

Appendix One provides a detailed work plan for the committee for the period April – June 2008. The key issues section below summarises the key areas of committee activity over this period.

#### **Key Issues**

The key work areas for the committee are outlined below. It is recognised that this represents a heavy workload for the committee but at the end of this period the following key outcomes will have been achieved:

- An agreed corporate plan.
- An agreed capital programme.
- An agreed process for the development of the city investment strategy.
- An agreed asset management strategy.
- An agreed strategic finance framework.
- An agreed strategic human resources management framework.
- An agreed code of governance and associated assurance framework.
- An agreed efficiency and value for money programme for 2009/10.
- An agreed performance management framework
- An agreed communications plan
- An agreed programme of work for RPA.
- An agreed early indicative district rate for 2009/10.

**April 2008**

**RPA** – An initial response to the Environment Minister's statement (31 March 2008) on RPA.

**NILGA** – Report on the Council's relationship with NILGA.

**Human Resources Strategy Framework** – the Chief Executive has started to provide Members with an outline framework for each of the key elements of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee's work. This month the Acting Head of Human Resources will present on the Human Resources Strategy framework.

**Financial Planning Cycle** – The committee agreed in March to receive a report on a revised financial planning cycle for the Council in April. This report will outline a revised cycle with a more detailed report being provided in May.

**May 2008**

**RPA** – a detailed report will be brought to committee which will examine the possible implications and key issues emerging from the outworking of the RPA recommendations. Members will be provided with a detailed programme of work which will enable the Council to effectively manage the change process which lies ahead.

**Corporate Governance / Assurance Framework** – this report will recommend a code of governance for the Council along with an overall assurance framework which will allow Members to satisfy themselves that the code is being complied with.

**Financial Planning Cycle** – detailed reported on a revised financial planning cycle which links to corporate and business planning in order to ensure Council priorities are properly resourced.

**Titanic Signature Project** – Special meeting to discuss the economic appraisal prepared by Deloitte.

**Rates** – Members have agreed to hold a special meeting on the issue of rates with the Chief Executive of Land and Property Services in attendance. At this meeting Members will be provided with a reference guide to the rating system and how it impacts on the Council.

**June 2008**

**Special Meeting to agree Corporate Plan** – Members will be asked to agree the new corporate plan.

**Efficiency Programme** – Members will be requested to agree a draft efficiency programme for the financial year 2009/10.

**Finance** - the Director of Corporate Services will present to committee on the Council's financial performance for 2007/08, notify them of the rates finalisation for 2007/08. He will also start the financial planning for 2009/10 with a discussion on an early indication of an acceptable district rate level.

**Asset Management Strategy** – the Director of Improvement will present for agreement an Asset Management Strategy which outlines how the Council's assets can be used to

support the delivery of the corporate plan. He will also provide detailed reports on Harvester House and the City Hall.

**Capital Programme** – Members will be asked to agree the Capital Programme.

**City Investment Strategy** – the Chief Executive will present a report which will ask for agreement on the process for the identification and prioritisation of projects.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is requested to agree:

1. The forward work plan for October 2007 – March 2008 outlined in appendix one.

**April 2008**

RPA – Response to initial announcement

NILGA – Report on the Council's relationship with NILGA.

Northern Ireland Assembly liaison report

Update on Communications Review

Corporate Plan Update

Financial Planning Cycle

Audit Panel Minutes

Human Resources Strategic Framework

Tall Buildings Policy

Gasworks Site

**May 2008**

RPA – detailed programme of work

Code of Governance and Assurance Framework

Absence Figures 2007/08

Community Outreach and Long Term Unemployed Scheme

Financial Planning Cycle

Special Meeting on Titanic Signature Project

Special Meeting on Rates

**June**

Special Meeting to Agree Corporate Plan

Capital Programme

City Investment Strategy

Efficiency Programme 2009/10

Finance

- Report on 2007/08 financial performance
- Rates finalisation 2007/08
- Indicative Rate 2009/10



Asset Management Strategy

City Hall Refurbishment

Harvester House





### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Strategy 2008 - 2011 – Update on progress
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sharon McNicholl, Strategic Planning and Policy Manager

#### Relevant Background Information

This report provides an update for Members on the development of the corporate plan 2008-2011, and sets out the proposed timetable for its approval. At its last meeting the Committee received a report outlining how the corporate planning process will pull together a number of the key planning and resource allocation processes of the Council in order to allow the Committee to manage these in a coherent and efficient way. Progress with respect to a number of these processes is set out below.

#### Development of corporate objectives and priority actions

Work is ongoing to refine the five strategic themes which Members identified for the new corporate plan:

- Strong leadership;
- Economic growth and wealth creation;
- Community cohesion and well-being;
- Environmental sensitivity and sustainability;
- An organisation fit to lead and serve.

In line with Members' wish to see greater corporate and cross-departmental working, these are being taken forward by five thematic teams comprising senior officers from across all departments. Members will recall that the Council's Value Creation Map provides the template for planning in the organisation and the teams have been working to develop each of the strategic themes in line with the VCM template. In effect Members will have a complete overview of proposed plans for the next three years against which affordability limits and performance standards can be agreed and accountability allocated. Members have already agreed to be briefed on the proposed content of the themes and the dates for these **briefings**, which will be facilitated by Jon Huish, have now been established as **21-23 May**. Officers within CIT will be in touch with the party group leaders to agree a suitable time.

In order that the Committee have sufficient time to consider the proposed corporate plan and the mechanisms for its delivery, **it is proposed that a special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which all members of Council are**

**invited, is held in June.**

**Update on the development of strategies which will underpin the delivery of the corporate plan**

As Members are aware, the effective implementation of the corporate plan will be dependent upon the effective strategic management of resources in the organisation, including human resources, finance, and assets. In terms of human resources, a separate report on the Committee's agenda outlines the strategic human resources framework of the organisation which includes a new human resources strategy and the implementation of the workforce development plan. Further information in relation to these documents and the way in which these will help the Council achieve its objectives will form part of the proposed corporate plan workshop in June. A separate report is also provided in relation to the new financial planning cycle which sets out how the Council's corporate plan, once agreed, will inform the Council's budgeting process. A key role for Members in regard to the financial planning cycle is to set high level rate targets early in the financial year.

**City Investment, Capital and Assets**

Party Group briefings on the City Investment Strategy are underway. The documentation used for the briefings on the city investment strategy is attached at Appendix 1 and it is intended that the briefings on the corporate plan 2008-2011 will follow a similar format. A comprehensive report integrating recommendations with respect to the city investment strategy, the capital programme and the development of an asset management strategy will be brought to Members in June. In this way the future management and strategic allocation of capital and assets can be considered in line with the goals for the city set by Members within the corporate plan.

By the end of June, Members will have a complete suite of documents comprising our corporate plan, setting out actions for 2008-2011, the financial plan to support these actions and a city investment strategy. It will be on the basis of these plans that the performance management will operate and that on-going, active, political direction will be sought as implementation occurs and our plans are tested against every day realities.

**Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the report, particularly that party briefings on the corporate plan will take place from 21-23 May.

Members are asked to agree that a special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which other members are invited, is held in June so that the draft corporate plan 2008-2011 can be discussed and agreed.



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Financial Planning Cycle Update</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18 April 2008</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	<b>Trevor Salmon, Director of Corporate Services</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Trevor Salmon, Director of Corporate Services</b>

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to update Members on work being done to revise the current financial planning cycle.

**Relevant Background Information**

The financial plans of the organisation are simply a monetary expression of what the Council wants to deliver and therefore they need to reflect our key priorities and objectives. The best organisations ensure that their business and financial planning are very closely aligned and integrated. A key action therefore for the Council this year is to further align and integrate financial and business planning.

**Key Issues**

Officers are currently working to develop a revised integrated and aligned business and financial planning cycle. A full report which will detail the outcome of this work will be presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May.

The work completed to date, however, has highlighted an issue which needs to be brought to Members attention before the May meeting. In previous years the financial planning cycle started in September with the Director of Corporate Services issuing budget guidance to departments. For the new corporate plan, however, the organisation will have to find ways of financing new priorities and still deliver core services. This will be a significant challenge as basically we will have to do more with the same amount of money. It is therefore likely that many resource conflicts will arise which will require significant time to resolve. In order to allow sufficient time to identify the budget needs of both core services and new priorities and develop options for resolving conflicts between them, it is recommended that the financial planning cycle should start in June 2008.

This will mean that the Director of Corporate Services will require in June an indication from Members of what their ambitions will be for the district rate for 2009/10. To facilitate this, the Director of Corporate Services will provide Members with the rates finalisation figures for 2007/08 and an analysis of the Council's financial performance for the same period. Members will be provided with a more detailed briefing as part of the corporate plan briefings which are due to held on 21-23 May 2008.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is requested to agree:

1. To start the financial planning cycle in June 2008.
2. To receive a detailed report on integrated financial and business planning in May.
3. To provide the Director of Corporate Services with an indication of Members ambition for the district rate for next year at the June meeting of Committee.



### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Strategic Human Resources Management Framework
<b>Date:</b>	18 April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Trevor Salmon, Jill Minne

#### Relevant Background Information

Strategic human resource (HR) management is central to the council's improvement agenda because:

- The people who work for the council are at the heart of delivering high quality services to Belfast's citizens, visitors and stakeholders.
- Sustaining and developing our capacity to secure the success of the council to meet the challenges ahead depends on the quality, motivation and commitment of our staff to make our ambitions a reality. We need the right number of people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.
- Over the next few years, especially because of RPA, it is likely that the council's workforce will change in size and nature. Clearer alignment of the planning and development of our workforce with corporate strategic, financial asset and business planning will better optimise our workforce capacity and people management practices.

Like strategic financial planning, strategic HR management is an essential element of good corporate governance; it forms part of the foundations of the organisation, underpinning the delivery of agreed priorities; and provides the basis of accountability to members and the citizens of Belfast for the stewardship and use of resources.

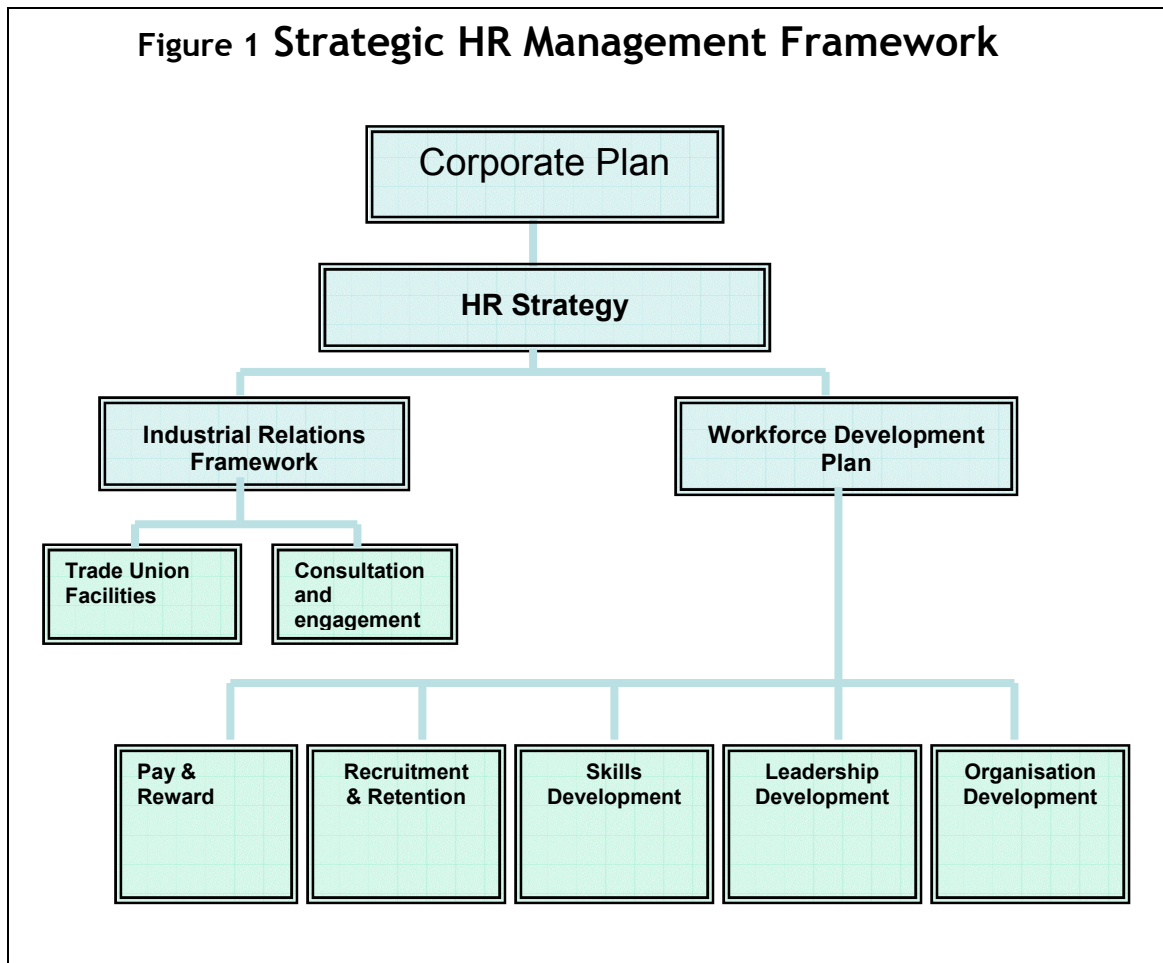
The improvement agenda update report discussed by committee last month included some of the key improvement actions undertaken during 2007/08 in relation to strategic HR management.

The purpose of this report is :

- To outline for members the overall strategic HR management framework of the organisation
- To agree HR reports for the committee for May and June 2008/09.

#### Key Issues

The strategic HR framework of the council is set out below.



The key outputs of the HR planning processes in the council are the HR strategy and Workforce Development Plan. These plans set out what we will do to support the delivery of members' key priorities and objectives.

### **HR Strategy**

The overall purpose of the HR Strategy is to ensure that the HR function underpins both the day to day activities of the council and the achievement of its medium to longer term objectives in meeting members' vision and ambition for the future.

Key HR goals relate to achieving enhanced performance in areas such as leadership of place, customer focus, performance management etc. They were identified through an analysis of members' emerging priorities; relevant external factors; the council's value creation map (VCM); and the internal factors that will enable or hinder the achievement of the Corporate Plan.

### **Workforce Development Plan**

The Workforce Development Plan is essentially the delivery mechanism for the HR strategy and sets out how the council will recruit, support, develop and retain employees to support its corporate strategy; it focuses on improving current and developing new processes around the key themes of:

1. Pay and reward
2. Recruitment and retention
3. Skills Development
4. Leadership Development



## 5. Organisation Development

Progress on the main actions under these themes is under way. For example:

- Attendance and capability policies have been agreed and a robust performance management approach to attendance implemented.
- A review of our Occupational Health service is under way to ensure it is fit for the purpose of supporting a strong culture of attendance in Belfast City Council
- Effective processes for the staffing elements of the Scheme of Delegation are currently being reviewed
- Chief officers, heads of service/senior management appraisal scheme is being fundamentally revised.
- Timely and accurate management information is being developed to support effective people management.
- 'Satisfactory service' has been defined for use in relation to incremental progression through our new pay and grading system.
- The recruitment aspects of the advertising review are being implemented.
- More effective community outreach measures are being developed.

Many of the approaches outlined in the HR strategy and Workforce Development Plan require the ability to specify clearly what skills and behaviours are required e.g. to underpin the culture, or when writing job descriptions, assessing performance and identifying development needs. The development of a competency framework for the council is therefore a key strategic initiative. It will identify clearly the competencies, skills and behaviours required to deliver members' priorities and corporate objectives. This will enable us to translate the various organisational requirements into what individuals need to be able to do. This will in turn help us to be specific about what we want from people we recruit, develop and promote.

More information on the HR strategy and Workforce Development Plan and their associated key actions will be brought to committee in June. Some examples of key actions are summarised in appendix one.

It is important to note that these actions are in addition to those required for continuing delivery of existing 'status quo' services.

### **Industrial Relations Framework**

Members are aware that the council's industrial relations are critical. They can be a potential block to progress, but also an enabler of change. Consequently we are monitoring and reviewing our industrial relations framework to ensure we have effective mechanisms for TU and staff consultation, negotiation, and policy-making that are linked to corporate, HR and business planning.

### **Delivery**

Finally, in relation to the delivery of the HR strategy, Workforce Development Plan, and the industrial relations framework we have an operational HR service that is trying to move to one that also supports strategic human resource management and the management of change and organisational development (OD) in the council. The review of the centre of the organisation may therefore need to prioritise the review of the HR function to ensure we can effectively do this.

**Proposed HR reports to Committee May and June 2008**

**May**

- Year-end absence analysis and agree future targets
- Report on the council's Community Outreach programme

**June**

- Report on HR Strategy and Workforce Development Plan key actions.

**Recommendations**

Members are requested to note the contents of the report and agree HR reports for May and June 2008 as outlined above.

**Summary of key actions in HR Strategy and Workforce Development Plan**

- Pay and Reward**
- Finalise Single Status arrangements
  - Develop programme of Equal Pay Reviews
  - Implement mechanism for ensuring fair and robust incremental pay progression based on 'satisfactory service'
  - Agree and implement individual performance management systems
- Recruitment and retention**
- Make recruitment processes more flexible, including, E recruitment, and the streamlining of job descriptions and the secondments process
  - Promote BCC as an employer of choice
  - Review processes for the staffing aspect of Scheme of Delegation
  - Implement the recruitment aspects of the council's advertising review
- Skills Development**
- Personal development plans (PDPs) implemented across whole council
  - Learning and development policy to ensure equal access to training and training efficiencies.
  - Delivery of the Step Up to Learn programme and devise a corporate approach to essential skills provision
  - Revised competency framework in place
  - Develop BCC line managers development programme in line with the competency framework
- Leadership Development**
- Contribute to member development
  - Delivery of development activities for chief officers, heads of service, elected members and senior managers
  - Create a revised BCC competency framework
  - Revise Chief officers', heads of service and managers' appraisal system
  - Develop a succession planning framework
- Organisation Development**
- Absence management – a continuing priority
  - Develop timely and accurate HR management information
  - Embed Capability policy
  - Review of Employee Relations policies
  - Manage HR implications of RPA.
  - Agree a corporate approach to liP
  - Agree effective mechanisms for TU and staff consultation, negotiation, and policy-making that are linked to corporate, HR and business planning.
  - Manage actions from employee survey.
  - Mainstream equality and diversity in BCC
  - Widen effective outreach measures.
  - Review health and safety arrangements across BCC
  - Review Occupational Health provision to support culture of attendance in BCC





**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Requests for the Provision of Hospitality
<b>Date:</b>	Friday, 18 <sup>th</sup> April, 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (ext. 6325)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ms. Sandra Robinson, Lord Mayor's Principal Officer (ext. 6244)

**Relevant Background Information**

A schedule of applications, together with an indication as to whether they fall within the criteria approved by the Committee, is attached as Appendix 1.

**Key Issues**

To advise the Committee of applications which have been received for the Use of Accommodation in the City Hall and/or the Provision of Civic Hospitality.

**Resource Implications**

Provision has been made in the Revenue Estimates for hospitality.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to approve the recommendations as set out in the Appendix.

**Key to Abbreviations**

Not applicable

**Documents Attached**

None



## Appendix 1

**SCHEDULE OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE USE OF ACCOMMODATION AND  
THE PROVISION OF CIVIC HOSPITALITY**

<b>Organisation/ Body</b>	<b>Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Greenwood Primary School	50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner  17 <sup>th</sup> May 2008 (evening)  Approximately 150 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception	This event seeks to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Greenwood Primary School and to acknowledge the contribution of the school to the general life and well-being of the city.	Provision of a pre-dinner drinks reception  Approximate cost £600  Approximate budget remaining £199,400
City of Belfast School of Music	Annual Students' Recital and Presentation of Awards  13 <sup>th</sup> June, 2008 (evening)  Approximately 200 Attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception and canapes	The Council has a close working relationship with the School of Music which provides entertainment at many of the Civic Functions.  This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Providing Civic Leadership and would contribute to its Key Priority Issue of Improving Service Provision to Children and Young People.	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception and canapes  Approximate cost £2,000  Approximate budget remaining £197,400
Northern Ireland Centre of Excellence in Public Health Research	Excellence in Public Health Research Conference  18 <sup>th</sup> June 2008 (evening)  Approximately 80 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	It is estimated that 30 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Provision of a drinks reception  Approximate cost £320  Approximate budget remaining £197,080
Queen's University Belfast	The 3 <sup>rd</sup> European Conference on Apidology  8 <sup>th</sup> September, 2008 (evening)  Approximately 300 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	It is estimated that 300 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Provision of a drinks reception  Approximate cost £1,200  Approximate budget remaining £195,880
International Map Trade Association	International Map Trade Association Trade Show	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	It is estimated that 150 delegates will be staying in accommodation in	Provision of a drinks reception  Approximate cost

	19 <sup>th</sup> February 2009 (evening)  Approximately 150 attending		Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	£600  Approximate budget remaining £195,280
British Association of Critical Care Nurses	British Association of Critical Care Nurses 24 <sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  14 <sup>th</sup> September 2009 (evening)  Approximately 500 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception	It is estimated that 500 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	Provision of a drinks reception  Approximate cost £2,000  Approximate budget remaining £193,280



## Audit Panel

Wednesday, 2nd April, 2008

### MEETING OF AUDIT PANEL

Members present: Councillor Hartley (Chairman); and  
Councillors Ekin, Mullaghan, Rodway and Dr. Smith.

In attendance: Mr. T. Salmon, Director of Corporate Services;  
Mr. A. Wilson, Head of Audit, Governance and  
Risk Services;  
Mr. A. Harrison, Acting Corporate Assurance  
Manager;  
Mrs. G. Ireland, Corporate Risk and Governance  
Manager;  
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator;  
Mr. J. Buchanan, Chief Local Government Auditor; and  
Mr. S. Knox, Local Government Auditor.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th March were taken as read and signed as correct.

### Ms. Cathy Haughey

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services introduced to the Panel Ms. Cathy Haughey, a member of staff of the Audit, Governance and Risk Services Section who had received specialist training from the National Audit Office in London in the area of value-for-money. He indicated that Ms. Haughey would be leading the value-for-money initiative which would result in a number of reviews being undertaken throughout the Council.

### Indicative Programme of Work 2008/2009

The Panel considered an indicative programme of work which had been prepared by the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services, a copy of which is set out hereunder:

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**Audit Panel,  
Wednesday, 2nd April, 2008**

**“BELFAST CITY COUNCIL AUDIT PANEL –  
INDICATIVE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2008/09**

<b>APRIL 08</b>	<b>JUNE 08</b>	<b>SEPTEMBER 08</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve LGA (external) Audit Plan and note interim management letter (if applicable)</li> <li>• Report on programme of value for money work</li> <li>• To consider the Council’s arrangements for corporate governance and agreeing necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services’ annual report and opinion and summary of internal audit activity.</li> <li>• Annual review of the effectiveness of Audit, Governance and Risk Services.</li> <li>• To review the draft annual statement of accounts. Specifically to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the Council.</li> <li>• To oversee the production of the Council’s Statement on Internal Control / Governance Statement and to recommend its adoption.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on risk management arrangements</li> <li>• Overview of the Council’s constitution in respect of contract procedure rules, financial regulations and codes of conduct and behaviour.</li> <li>• Report on Council policies on whistleblowing and the anti-fraud and corruption strategy.</li> <li>• Report on value for money audit work</li> </ul>
<b>DECEMBER 08</b>	<b>JANUARY 09</b>	<b>MARCH 09</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To receive the Local Government Auditor’s annual letter, management letter and relevant reports</li> <li>• Review of Audit Panel training needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit Panel training day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Audit Panel terms of reference and Audit, Governance and Risk Services terms of reference.</li> <li>• Approve Audit, Governance and Risk Services (internal audit) Strategy and Annual Plan.</li> <li>• Review external member arrangements”</li> </ul>

After discussion, during which the Director of Corporate Services indicated that the indicative programme would not preclude the Panel from holding additional meetings to discuss urgent business, the Panel approved its indicative programme of work as set out above.

Audit Panel,  
Wednesday, 2nd April, 2008

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**Northern Ireland Audit Office – Audit Strategy  
for Belfast City Council 2007/2008**

The Chief Local Government Auditor explained that, under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, he was required to examine, certify and report on the financial statements of Belfast City Council. Accordingly, he had issued an Audit Strategy for Belfast City Council for the 2007/2008 financial statements, which set out the:

- (i) responsibilities for the preparation of accounts and associated regulations;
- (ii) scope of the audit;
- (iii) audit approach;
- (iv) records which needed to be provided for audit inspection; and
- (v) timescales which would be involved.

The Chief Local Government Auditor pointed out that the Council was required to submit the accounts for audit by 30th June, drew the Panel's attention to various aspects of the Strategy and answered questions which were put to him by the Members. He indicated that the reserves which a local authority held should be balanced and that it would be acceptable for a Council to operate with a level of reserves which was equivalent to one month's expenditure.

In answer to a further question, the Director of Corporate Services indicated that, since Belfast City Council was a borrowing, rather than an investing, organisation, it was at little risk from the current turmoil in the money markets.

Following further discussion, the Panel agreed to note the contents of the Audit Strategy for the Council for the 2007/2008 financial year and the comments thereon of the Chief Local Government Auditor.

**Value-for-Money Audit Programme 2008/2009**

The Audit Panel considered the undernoted report:

**“Relevant Background Information**

**The Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) Annual Strategy and Plan for 2008/09 was presented to the Audit Panel in March 2008. The Plan included a provision of 75 auditor days for a programme of value-for-money studies. In addition, a further 40 days had been set aside for analysis and other audit work in relation to travel, giving a total of 115 days. It should be noted that the provision of AGRS time did not preclude the use of other resources to undertake reviews or the possibility of reviewing the AGRS plan during the course of the year. However, it is important that value-for-money work does not negatively impact on the ability of AGRS to fulfil its primary purpose in relation to delivery of an independent assurance on the Council's risk management, internal control and governance arrangements.**

Audit Panel,  
Wednesday, 2nd April, 2008

The Panel approved the Audit Strategy and Plan at its meeting in March and also agreed with a proposal that a programme of value-for-money studies would be developed and presented to the Panel at its next meeting. The purpose of this paper is therefore to present a programme of proposed value-for-money audits for 2008/09 and invite Audit Panel comments on this programme of work.

The proposed programme of value-for-money audits should not be viewed in isolation to other initiatives that are ongoing to help the Council secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. Indeed, as reported to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 14 March 2008, a scoping report is to be externally commissioned to identify areas in which savings can be realised in time for the 2009/10 budget. Routine internal audit work also has a value-for-money aspect to it and we routinely review arrangements to ensure compliance with contracts, tendering procedures etc.

### Key Issues

#### 1. Concept of Value-for-Money

In simple terms Economy means how much we pay for people, assets, goods and services; Efficiency is about how much we get out of the combination of people, assets and goods and services and Effectiveness is a measure of what difference it makes. Value-for-money audits seek to review the arrangements to achieve these 3 'E's.' They may also cover income-generating activities.

#### 2. Key Considerations in Selecting Areas for Review

It is important in considering areas for review to consider issues such as:

- The *importance* of the area in terms of income/expenditure, Member/management concerns, reputational risk etc
- The *feasibility* of undertaking the review at a particular point in time. For example, are the resources and expertise available to conduct a review, how long will it take, is adequate information available to conduct the review successfully, is the timing of the review appropriate?
- *Implementation prospects*. What are the prospects for the review resulting in a successful outcome? i.e. resulting in the achievement of significant savings/efficiencies.

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### **3. Stages of a Value-for-Money review**

Value for money studies involve a number of key stages:

- Planning the review
- Completion of the review / reporting
- Agreement of recommendations to make improvements
- Follow-up reviews to ensure that recommendations have been implemented
- Subsequent re-review of the area to see if improvements have translated into improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness

It is important to understand that, depending on the area being reviewed, it can take time to implement improvements. It is also important to ensure that value-for-money studies do not end with the issue of an audit report. The Panel, with the assistance of AGRS, has a key role to play in continual monitoring of whether changes are implemented and whether efficiencies or savings actually materialise.

### **4. Proposed Programme of Value-for-Money Studies**

Having taken account of the above issues there are a number of areas that we are proposing to undertake value-for-money reviews of. These can be divided into:

- Priority areas i.e. work already underway or where the area has already been referred to the Panel. These are set out in Table 1 of Appendix 1.
- Other possible areas which could be considered, subject to the approval / views of the Panel. These are set out in Table 2 of Appendix 1.

### **Resource Implications**

The 'priority' areas set out in Table 1, Appendix 1 can be resourced through the existing AGRS Plan. Other possible areas will be considered and, where possible, accommodated into the AGRS Plan. Where the studies cannot be resourced by AGRS we will consider alternative means of resourcing these studies and will report back to Members on any significant resource implications.

### **Recommendations**

That the Audit Panel approves the areas set out as 'priority' areas for value-for-money studies set out at Table 1, Appendix 1.

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That the Audit Panel considers whether it wishes AGRS to embark on reviews of the other possible areas, such as those set out at Table 2, Appendix 1 or wishes to recommend reviews of other areas.

**Key to Abbreviations**

AGRS – Audit, Governance and Risk Services  
VFM – Value-for-money

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – Value-for-Money Audit Programme 2008/09

**Appendix 1 – Value-for-Money Audit Programme 2008/09**

**Table 1 – Priority Areas**

These are value-for-money studies that AGRS is committed to or have been referred to the Audit Panel/Audit, Governance and Risk Services.

<b><u>Area</u></b>	<b><u>Scope of Work*</u></b>	<b><u>Estimated Days</u></b>	<b><u>Timescales (quarters of financial year 2008/09)</u></b>
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of travel costs</li> <li>• Input to group reviewing processes</li> <li>• Review of effectiveness of <u>new</u> processes</li> <li>• Review of travel costs / budget to identify whether savings or efficiencies are projected</li> </ul>	40	Quarter 1 Quarter 1  Quarter 4  Quarter 4
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of arrangements to ensure the achievement of economy, effectiveness and efficiency in the purchasing of goods/services</li> <li>• Review of corporate procurement strategy and operational plans</li> </ul>	25	Quarters 1-2

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<u>Area</u>	<u>Scope of Work*</u>	<u>Estimated Days</u>	<u>Timescales (quarters of financial year 2008/09)</u>
Overtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of action taken to implement corporate audit report recommendations on overtime</li> <li>• Review of actions taken by departments to implement departmental audit report recommendations on overtime</li> <li>• Review of overtime costs / budget to identify whether savings made</li> </ul>	25	Quarter 3
Absence Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of action taken to implement corporate audit report recommendations on absence management</li> <li>• Review of actions taken by departments to implement departmental audit report recommendations on absence management</li> <li>• Review of cost of absence information/reporting and link to budgeting (Note: review of effectiveness of new attendance policy not appropriate until 2009/10).</li> </ul>	25	Quarter 2  Quarter 2  Quarter 2
Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of action taken to implement new protocol on publications / review of effectiveness of policy</li> <li>• Review of current publications costs and comparison with prior year budgets</li> </ul>	25	Quarters 1 / 2  Quarters 1 / 2
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of effectiveness of advertising policy and compliance therewith (including general advertising and job advertisements)</li> <li>• Review of advertising costs and comparison with prior year costs</li> </ul>	25	Quarter 4

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**Table 2 – Other Possible Value for Money Reviews**

Other possible areas for review are as follows. We would welcome Member comments / views on the priority of these areas. Subject to comments further consideration will then be given to the scope of these reviews and the resources required to complete them.

<u>Areas*</u>	<u>Comment</u>
<b>Cemetery charges / services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review of charging structure (income generation)</li> </ul>
<b>Stores</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of stores</li> </ul>
<b>Mobile Phones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review of contracts/economy</li> <li>• review of arrangements for re-payment of personal calls</li> </ul>
<b>Utility costs (inc fuel)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of current arrangements</li> </ul>

**\* Note – detailed terms of reference will be developed for approved reviews.”**

The Acting Corporate Assurance Manager indicated that the analysis in connection with the value-for-money audit into travel was being undertaken at present, with the intention that new processes would be presented to a meeting of the Chief Officers’ Management Team later in the month, following which a new Policy regarding travel would be put in place.

In answer to a Members’ questions, the Director of Corporate Services indicated that the City Investment Strategy was being funded through the rationalisation of Council-owned property and that it was anticipated that at least £30 million could be raised from the sale or lease of such property over the next three-year period.

After discussion, the Panel approved the value-for-money audit programme for the period 2008/2009 and agreed to receive a report at a future meeting regarding other possible audits as set out in Table 2 in Appendix 1.

**Audit, Governance and Risk Services – Progress Report**

The Panel considered a report regarding the work which Audit, Governance and Risk Services had undertaken since the Panel’s meeting on 10th December.

The Acting Corporate Assurance Manager informed the Members that, following comments made at that meeting, the progress report had been amended to provide more information regarding the Section’s recommendations contained within finalised audits, investigations and value-for-money reviews. Accordingly, a revised tabular



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layout had been adopted which showed the original recommendation, the management response and implementation dates. In addition, for finalised reports it indicated the detailed “high” priority recommendations, together with a brief summary of the scope of audit work, audit opinion and when follow-up reviews would be held.

Following discussion, the Panel noted the comments of the Acting Corporate Assurance Manager and the contents of the progress report.

### **Annual Governance Statement 2007/2008**

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Relevant Background Information**

**Regulation 2 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 required councils to review the “effectiveness of their system of internal control” at least once a year and to publish a statement of internal control (SIC) each year along with the authority’s financial statements. It also required the findings of the review to be considered by a Committee of the council (or the whole council).**

**To this end BCC had instituted a number of measures in order to be compliant within the timescales as determined by the DOE.**

**However, on 29th February 2008 DOE issued Circular LG/04/08 effectively stating that proper practices in relation to internal control relates to the guidance in two documents:**

- Statement of Internal Control in Local Government; meeting the requirements of the above legislation, published by CIPFA in 2004**
- Delivering Good Governance: Framework produced by CIPFA/SOLACE in 2007**

**The new CIPFA/SOLACE governance requires an annual governance statement and DOE has confirmed that the annual governance statement will replace the SIC with effect from 2007/08 reporting year (i.e. from April 2007). As a result the council is required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement without having completed a SIC.**

**The Framework outlines six core principles of good governance focusing on the systems and processes for the direction and control of the organisation and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. The Framework emphasises that good governance and therefore the process and statement should be corporately owned.**

The degree to which the council follows the six core principles should be declared in an Annual Governance Statement.

There is an existing process for the review of the internal control system, and significant progress has been made in establishing a process for the collation of information and compilation of the Statement of Internal Control. The Annual Governance Statement goes much wider than the SIC but the assurance gathering process is similar

The DOE has recognised as in the case of the Council that even though the preparatory work in relation to the SIC can be carried forward to the Annual Governance Statement additional requirements may be placed on the council in order to achieve full compliance.

It would be the intention of the council to produce the Annual Governance Statement for 2007/08 and to include within its disclosure the intention to be compliant by 1 April 2009 (or earlier)

**Action required to fully comply by 1st April 2009**

Key actions that should be taken to ensure that the Council is fully compliant with the new regulations include:

- Ongoing embedding of risk management framework within the Council, including the risk reporting framework
- Implementation of an 'assurance chain', i.e. assurance statements which build up through various levels of management until the final one prepared by the Chief Financial Officer
- Approval and communication of the Belfast City Council Code of Governance within the context of the Council wide Assurance Framework

AGRS is leading the implementation of the above actions.

**Key Issues**

There are no key issues.

**Resource Implications**

The AGRS plan of work for 2008/09 has taken account of the action required to help the Council meet the requirements of the new Annual Governance Statement.

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In addition Directors and Heads of Service have a role to play in terms of:

- embedding risk management within their departments / services / projects
- working with AGRS to develop the quarterly risk reporting framework
- preparing and signing the annual assurance statements
- maintaining the existing systems, processes and documents that provide evidence of compliance with the Code, in addition to undertaking the planned improvement actions derived from the corporate plan portfolio. AGRS will review the Code annually to ensure its continued adequacy and effectiveness and will report findings to the Assurance Board and Audit Panel.

#### Recommendations

That the Audit Panel notes the implications of the new Regulations.

#### Key to Abbreviations

AGRS	Audit, Governance and Risk Services
CIPFA	The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
SIC	Statement on Internal Control
DOE	Department of the Environment
SOLACE	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives"

Following discussion, the Panel adopted the recommendation set out in the foregoing report.

#### Dates of Future Meetings

The Panel agreed that the dates of its meetings in the coming year be set by the Chairman, in conjunction with the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services.

Chairman



**Supplementary to Audit Panel Agenda Item 6**



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy and Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Annual Governance Statement 2007/08</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>18th April 2008</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	<b>Andrew Wilson, Head of AGRS</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Gay Ireland, Corporate Risk and Governance Manager</b>

**Relevant Background Information**

The Head of AGRS presented a report "Annual Governance Statement 2007/8", to the Audit Panel at its meeting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> April (Agenda item 6). This report dealt with the implications to the Council of DOE guidance (LG/04/08). This guidance was issued to Councils to provide guidance in relation to Regulation 2 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006.

Regulation 2a provides that a local government body shall conduct a review each financial year on the effectiveness of its system of internal control and that a statement shall be prepared in accordance with proper practices.

The DOE have advised that they consider the *CIPFA Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2007)* to be appropriate professional guidance regarding proper practices.

This paper is presented to direct Members' attention to Audit Panel Agenda Item 6, the actions taken so far to ensure compliance with the guidance and the implications for the Council.

**Key Issues**

As outlined in Audit Panel Agenda Item 6, a key implication of these changes is that commencing for the year end 2007/8, the Council will be required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement. This will form part of the annual accounts. The DOE guidance also refers to the procedure regarding the approval and signing of the statement of accounts, and states that the intention is that either the chair of the local government body or committee of the local government body would sign. In our case, this would be either the Lord Mayor or the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

We would recommend that, given the responsibility of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in relation to financial matters, it would be appropriate that the Chair would formally sign and date the statement of accounts and that this would represent the completion of the approval process of the accounts. It should also be noted that the certification by the chief financial officer would be done before the accounts are presented to committee.

It is intended that the Head of AGRS will present a further report to the Audit Panel and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May on the Council's Code of Governance aligned to the *CIPFA/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2007) and a proposed Assurance Framework to support it.*

**Resource Implications**

None

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee acts as the signatory to the annual statement of accounts which will include the Annual Governance Statement.

**Key to Abbreviations**

AGRS Audit, Governance and Risk Services  
COMT Chief Officer's Management Team

**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy and Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Titanic Signature Project</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2008</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	<b>Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Kevin Heaney (ext 6202)</b>

<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>RELEVANT BACKGROUND</u></b>
1.1	Members will recall that a consortium made up of Titanic Quarter Limited (Harcourt Developments Ltd, Belfast Harbour Commissioners), the Northern Ireland Tourism Board and the Titanic Alliance supported an application to the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks Programme for funding of £25million towards the realisation of a £90million iconic Titanic Signature Project in Belfast.
2.2	The failure to attract a grant from the Big Lottery Fund had resulted in a funding shortfall of £25million for the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). A reconfiguration of the proposed funding structure would require £40 million from the Northern Ireland Executive (DETI), £40million from the Titanic Quarter Limited and the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and the Council has been asked to contribute the outstanding £10million towards the realisation of the TSP.
2.3	The Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at a special meeting on 29 <sup>th</sup> February, 2008, reaffirmed its support for the building of the Titanic Signature Project and the need for the Council to show leadership by investing in iconic projects which would bring significant benefit to the City. The Committee agreed that consideration should be given to investing £10million in the project, subject to a full due diligence review being undertaken.
<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>CURRENT POSITION</u></b>
2.1	Accordingly, Deloitte has been commissioned by the Council to undertake a detailed economic appraisal and due diligence review of the proposals for TSP.
2.2	As part of this work, Deloitte has been asked to specifically examine and give consideration to the undernoted issues:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. independently appraise the feasibility study undertaken of the Titanic Signature Project and examine the financial viability of the project proposals ensuring alignment with the revised economic appraisal being taken forward by DETI;</li> <li>2. assess the degree of risk to the Council attached to its investment decision;</li> <li>3. examine the governance arrangements for the project in terms of the creation of an appropriate delivery vehicle, the level of representation the Council should request on the Board and the oversight arrangements it should put in place to oversee the ongoing management of the TSP;</li> <li>4. outline those conditions which the Council should attach to any offer, if agreed, of funding to safeguard its position; and</li> <li>5. set out the main benefits of the Titanic Signature Project and wider Titanic Quarter Development for Belfast in both socio-economic and social terms.</li> </ul>
2.3	Members will note that at the Council meeting on the 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2008, Members strongly articulated their aspirations for the TSP and the need for it to bring much wider social and economic benefits to the city and the citizens. It was suggested that any consideration given by the Council to the potential funding of the TSP should take into account the wider social impact of the Titanic Quarter in general for the city. Accordingly Deloitte has been requested to

engage directly with political and community representatives to capture the main concerns and develop recommendations on how they might be addressed.

A draft report on the Titanic Signature Project due diligence exercise being undertaken by Deloitte on behalf of the Council is expected by the end of April and it is, therefore, recommended that a special meeting of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which all Members of Council be invited, be scheduled in May to discuss this in more detail.

**3.0 Resource Implications**

Financial and Human Resources

There are no Financial or Human Resource implications contained within this report.

**4.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to agree that a special meeting of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, to which all Members of Council be invited, be arranged, in liaison with the Chairman, for May 2008 to discuss the findings of the Deloitte due diligence exercise currently being undertaken.





**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Standing Order 55 – Employment of Relatives
<b>Date:</b>	18 April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Trevor Salmon, Director of Corporate Services, ext 6083
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jill Minne, Principal HR Advisor (Acting Head of Human Resources), ext 3220

**Relevant Background Information**

To inform the Committee of delegated authority exercised by the Director of Corporate Services to the employment of individuals who are related to existing officers of the Council.

The Director of Corporate Services has authorised the appointment of the following individuals who are related to existing officers of the Council in accordance with the authority delegated to him by the Policy and Resources (Personnel) Sub-Committee on 27 June, 2005. The Committee is asked to note the appointments authorised by the Director under Standing Order 55.

<b>NAME OF NEW EMPLOYEE</b>	<b>POST APPOINTED TO</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING OFFICER</b>	<b>NAME OF EXISTING OFFICER</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT</b>
Anthony Clarke	Casual Leisure Attendant	Brother	Andrew Steenson	Parks and Leisure
Karen Doherty	Casual Leisure Attendant	Daughter	Edward Joseph Doherty	Parks & Leisure
Joseph Carson	Operations Supervisor (Transport and Priority Waste)	Brother	Martin Carson	Corporate Services

**Resource Implications**

Financial

Provision for these posts exist within the revenue budgets of the relevant departments.

Human Resources

There are no Human Resource considerations. All appointments have been made on the basis of merit in accordance with the Council's Recruitment Policies.

Asset and Other Implications

There are no other implications.

**Recommendations**

Committee is asked to note the appointments authorised by the Director of Corporate Services in accordance with Standing Order 55.



### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	Lands at Hannahstown Hill
<b>Date:</b>	18 April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ciaran Quigley, Director of Legal Services (Ext 6038)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	John Walsh, Principal Solicitor (Ext 6042)

#### Relevant Background Information

The Council is the owner of lands (6.5 acres) at Hannahstown Hill which are the subject of a judicial review application by a former owner. Following a failed attempt to vest the lands, the then owner entered into an agreement for the sale of the lands to the Council in 1994. The land was not used for the purpose for which it was originally acquired and on the 30 June 2004, was re-appropriated to be held for the improvement, development or future development of the Council's district. The former owner contends that, under certain legal provisions applying to the acquisition and disposal of land, the site at Hannahstown is and has been surplus and that, as such, the Council is under an obligation to offer it back to him given that it was acquired under threat of vesting. Senior Counsel (Mr John O'Hara QC) has given strong advice to the effect that the Council has a significant level of vulnerability in relation to the legal proceedings issued by the former owner and has recommended that the Council should reach agreement with the him to achieve settlement. In light of Senior Counsel's advice, the Director of Legal Services (DLS) has come to the conclusion that the Council should agree to settlement terms on the basis that these are reasonable in all the circumstances and give due protection to the Council's legal and commercial interests.

#### Key Issues

More detailed explanation of the proposed settlement terms will be given to the Members at the meeting. While the DLS does have delegated authority to settle legal claims involving the Council's interests, he would ask the Committee to note the position and endorse the recommendation to enter into suitable terms of settlement.

#### Resource Implications

##### Financial

Legal costs

##### Human Resources

None

##### Asset and Other Implications

6.5 acres of land at Hannahstown Hill

#### Recommendations

To note the contents of the report for information.

#### Documents Attached

None





### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Growing the rates base – the future importance of tall buildings in Belfast
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 18 April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement

#### Relevant Background Information

##### **Purpose of Paper**

The purpose of this paper is to gain agreement from Members to request meetings between the Environment Minister (Arlene Foster), the Social Development Minister (Margaret Ritchie) and the Finance Minister (Peter Robinson) and a cross party delegation from the Council to lobby the case for tall buildings in Belfast to help achieve the Council's aim of growing the city's rates base and to act as a catalyst for further city investment.

##### **Background**

There are a number of proposals for mixed use (commercial/residential) tall buildings in and around the centre of Belfast. The developers involved are becoming increasingly frustrated that the major infrastructure opportunity for Belfast is not getting sufficient support from the Planning Service and a number of them have approached the Council for assistance.

The key argument for Council assistance is that developers increasingly see the Council as the custodian of the city's well-being. They cite the Council's position in regard to –

- welcoming investment particularly in the light of the forthcoming US conference and our own City Investment Strategy;
- our arguments about increasing the city's population;
- our ambition to be a leading European city with cutting edge architecture
- the need to consolidate the city centre as Titanic Quarter grows and creates displacement i.e. the proposed Belfast Metropolitan College and the associated reduction of student spend in the city
- the stated need for gateway projects in the Council's Masterplan e.g. Shaftesbury Square/Great Victoria Street

There are many aesthetic pros and cons for tall buildings but it is generally agreed that they work best in clusters.

Officers have explained that the Council cannot be expected to lobby Ministers on individual proposals but that the Committee might consider making a broader argument in regard to the overall impact on city investment and the city rate base.

##### **Current position**

Cities and their skylines evolve. The great cities of the world have internationally recognisable tall buildings which dominate their skylines and are instant landmarks – e.g. Tower 42 and Canary Wharf in London, the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building in New York, the Sears Tower in Chicago, the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai and the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur.

As Members are aware land is a scarce resource, particularly in city centres. This

necessitates greater density of development which often leads to the building of tall buildings. In cities across the world there is a growing trend towards multi-use tall buildings which house residential, office, commercial, shopping and even educational facilities under one roof. Tall buildings are seeing an unprecedented resurgence in the UK and across the world with 40% of the world's tallest buildings having been completed since 2000<sup>1</sup>.

The issue of tall buildings often sparks much heated debate with advocates both for and against them. There is much research to evidence that in the right place, tall buildings can make positive contributions to city life. They can be excellent works of architecture in their own right. Individually, or when built in clusters, they affect the image and identity of a city as a whole. In the right place they can serve as beacons of regeneration and stimulate further investment. The positive effect that a tall building can have on perceptions can extend to entire cities e.g. the recently completed 48 floor mixed use Beetham Tower in Manchester has promoted the city's image as a modern and dynamic place and attracted huge media interest. The Gherkin in London has shown how a top class, quality designed building can capture the public imagination and instantly become a symbol of a city.

However it is important that to note that tall buildings must be of a high quality design, be sustainable, environmentally friendly and socially responsible. For many people tall buildings are synonymous with the badly designed, cheaply built, badly maintained buildings which sprung up during the 60s which failed to meet the needs of their users and did little for their local environment.

### **Key Issues**

This is a time of great and exciting change for Belfast. Projects such as the new openly £400million Victoria Square and the regeneration of major sites such as Titanic will continue to change and transform the skyline. However it has been commented that Belfast is a *city of bungalows*. There are only a handful of buildings which could currently be considered as 'tall' including Windsor House in Bedford Street and the City Hospital. However these are older buildings and none could be considered buildings of high architectural merit.

In order to cement Belfast's unique position and to allow it to flourish as a global city there is a need to look at the issue of tall buildings and how this can be progressed to best meet the needs of the city.

#### **Policy Framework – Tall Buildings**

As Members are aware there are currently a number of tall buildings which have received full planning permission in Belfast although work has yet to commence on some of these e.g. the Obel development off Custom House Square and Bedford Square. A number of others are currently in the planning application stage including the iconic £90million/37 floor Aurora Building at Great Victoria Street. There are also a wide number of other tall buildings developments which are currently at the concept stage only across the city including the redevelopment of Windsor House in Bedford Street (which if redeveloped would be Ireland's tallest building) and the current site of Park House in Great Victoria Street. The significance of these developments is underlined by the fact that these three developments alone (Aurora/Park House/Windsor House) have a combined gross development value of more than Victoria Square.

As evidenced above there has been an increasing number of applications for tall buildings in Belfast over the past decade and it is likely that this will continue to increase as the city's reputation grows. However an emerging issue which is coming increasingly to the fore is that there is no overall policy framework for tall buildings in Northern Ireland. Decisions by the Planning Service on tall buildings in Belfast are taken on an individual basis as they come in with little acknowledgement given to the wider picture of how all the developments could work together or become clusters which will help stimulate further regeneration, growth and investment. There is also a tendency for risk adversity when it comes to these types of decisions due to the lack of direction in relation to

<sup>1</sup> The Economist June 2006

assessing proposals.

In contrast in England and Wales guidance is available on tall buildings which helps local planning authorities to evaluate planning applications for tall buildings and also offers good practice in relation to tall buildings. The policy guidance in England and Wales advises local planning authorities to identify locations for tall building in their development plans. Many English councils have separate tall buildings policies.

There is clearly a need for a 'tall building' framework to be developed. As Members are aware the Planning Service is currently undergoing a period of review and reform and it is timely to bring this issue up for debate.

**Population density and growing the city's rates base**

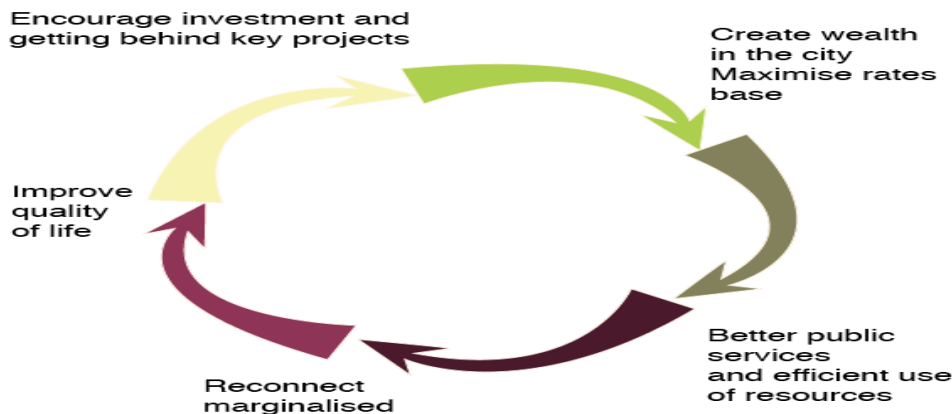
As Members are aware, Belfast's population is predicted to continue to decline over the next 20 years. It has already been acknowledged that this will have a detrimental effect on the city's rates base and the Council has already identified this as a strategic issue. Looking at ways to increase the population, particularly of trying to bring people back into the city centre, is one way to reverse this decline. Growing the city's population is also key to improved competitiveness as evidenced in Michael Parkinson's research and Belfast City Council has already outlined its aim to increase the city centre population by 100,000.

Across the UK there is a growing trend for 'apartment living' in city centres. City centre living offers many advantages – close proximity to shops and associated services and it also makes the best use of existing city centre infrastructure with good transport links. Maximising the development of existing brownfield sites in the city also helps to protect open space.

Building tall is not the only way to increase population density in cities but it is clear that tall buildings, particularly apartment blocks or mixed use developments, are a key way of helping to bring people back into the city centre and so helping to provide the intensification of activity and densification of people that help make cities thrive. For many years Belfast city centre was not regarded as a safe place to live however this is now starting to change with releases for high quality apartment blocks in the city centre selling out quickly e.g. the apartments at Victoria Square sold out at a time when there the housing market had taken a downturn and the apartments that were released at the Obel development at Custom House Square sold out within 48hours of release.

The diagram below shows how encouraging investment and getting behind key projects can help to grow and maximise the rates base in the city which in turn allows us to deliver better services and reconnect the marginalised. This is a key argument for the need for mixed use type of tall buildings in the city centre.

**Growing investment and meeting need  
The virtuous circle**



### **Gateways sites - Regeneration**

As highlighted tall buildings as flagship projects can also act as major catalysts for regeneration in areas. Tall buildings do not necessarily have to be in the core city centre to be successful. There are been numerous example of successful tall buildings which are on gateways sites around city centres – the very successful Beetham Tower in Manchester which is highlighted above was built outside the traditional core of the city centre. Developments on gateway sites can also benefit from having good public transport links.

Another strong example of a tall building which was on a gateway site and which acted as a major regeneration catalyst is One Canada Square, the main tower at Canary Wharf, which is still the tallest building in the UK. Despite having to contend with a recession shortly after construction, it sparked the transformation of the Isle of Dogs in London. The area is now a major financial, commercial, residential and leisure centre. While the office space contained in One Canada Square could have been provided in a lower building occupying a greater floor area, as a tall building it worked as a beacon, boldly signalling that the area was enjoying major investment and in turn helping to attract further investment in to the area.

The proposed cluster of tall buildings in the Great Victoria Square area of Belfast mentioned above could help to significantly regenerate this area and act as a catalyst for further regeneration.

### **Planning Gain – Tall buildings**

An excellent tall building should positively enhance its locality and share the benefits of the investment throughout the local area including improvements to the public realm and helping to secure additional public space. This can help contribute to the safety, diversity, sense of place and social engagement of an area. In England these additional improvements are often secured through the use of planning obligations.

The legislative basis for planning obligations is Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Planning obligations are defined as "*the principle of a planning applicant agreeing to provide additional benefits or safeguards, often for the benefit of the community, usually in the form of related developments*". Their purpose is to mitigate the impact of a proposed new development. S106 agreements can be undertaken in numerous ways – to *prescribe* the nature of development (e.g. by requiring that a given proportion of housing is affordable); or to secure a contribution from a developer to *compensate* for loss or damage (e.g. loss of open space); or to *mitigate* a development's impact (e.g. through increased public transport provision).

The experience from England and Wales would suggest that Section 106 arrangements – although complex and time-consuming to put into place, deliver real tangible outcomes. According to research carried out recently by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, planning agreements are now attached to 40% of major residential planning permissions in England compared to 26% in 1998. In 2003/04 the value of obligations agreed was estimated to be approximately £1.9bn.

There are no specific planning obligation provisions in place in Northern Ireland. However, Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 provides similar powers to Section 106. Article 40 is however much narrower and more one dimensional than Section 106 and can **only** be applied to the development in question. To date Article 40 agreements have been quite restrictively applied in Northern Ireland and the only real uses of it in Belfast have been with regards to transport related issues.

It is apparent that local authorities in Northern Ireland are missing a significant opportunity that is afforded to councils in GB due to the differences in the legal basis for planning obligations and that as a Council we are missing out on a potentially invaluable source of funding which could be used to significantly improve infrastructure.

The Council has a very robust position on the need for planning gain in Northern Ireland which has been consistently highlighted both in consultation responses (BMAP, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan etc.) and in discussions with the Planning Service and other Government Departments.

It is timely to consider this issue now given the ongoing review of the Planning Service in Northern Ireland and the outcome of the Review of Public Administration which will mean



that from 2011 local government will have responsibility for aspects of planning.

**Next Steps**

Tall buildings need to be considered for the positive qualities they can bring to Belfast. Belfast City Council is ambitious for the city which has been demonstrated by the commitment to creating a legacy for tomorrow '*Today's Actions, Tomorrow's Legacy*'. Tall buildings will help to cement Belfast's growing reputation as a city on the rise and will help generate confidence in its future - socially, economically and aesthetically. As Belfast currently has a limited number of tall buildings this also gives the city a unique opportunity to learn from the mistakes of other cities and to ensure that any high rise building are of the highest quality and use innovative design.

In order move this debate forward and to ensure that Belfast will have some truly iconic for the new century it is recommended that the Council requests a meeting with the Environment Minister, the Social Development Minister and the Finance Minister to lobby the strong case for tall buildings in Belfast based on the arguments highlighted above.

**Resource Implications**

N/A

**Recommendations**

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and -

- Agree to request meetings between the Environment Minister (Arlene Foster), Social Development Minister (Margaret Ritchie) and the Finance Minister (Peter Robinson) and a cross party delegation from the Council, led by the Chairs of the Strategic Policy and Resources and Development Committees, to lobby the case for tall buildings in Belfast as a mechanism to help grow the city's rate base and act as a catalyst for further city investment and to explore with Ministers the potential for planning gain to act as a mechanism to lever further resources into the provision of public infrastructure.

**Key to Abbreviations**

N/A

**Documents Attached**

Examples of tall buildings



## Appendix 1 – Examples of Tall Buildings – Belfast, UK and Ireland

### Obel Belfast



**Height:** 80 m

**Floors:** 26

**Status:** Planning Approval granted – foundation work started

**Type** – Residential

**Cost** - £50million

- Delays to project

### Aurora Building, Great Victoria Street Belfast



**Height:** 109m

**Floors:** 37

**Status:** Planning permission applied for

**Type** – Mixed use

**Cost** - £90million

- 291 apartments
- 7,000sq ft commercial
- Roof garden
- Gym
- Valet car parking
- Car club

### Bedford Square Belfast



**Height:** 104m  
**Floors:** 26  
**Status:** Planning approval granted  
**Type** – Commercial  
**Cost** -

- 235,000 sq ft of office space

### 30 St. Mary Axe, London (the Gherkin)



**Height:** 180 m  
**Floors:** 40  
**Status:** Completed  
**Type** – Commercial

- Opened in 2004
- Iconic building in London
- Public restaurant on 39<sup>th</sup> floor with a private dining room on the top floor
- Voted the 'Most Admired New Building In the World' in 2005

### Beetham Tower Manchester



**Height:** 171 m

**Floors:** 50

**Status:** Completed

**Type** – Mixed Use

**Cost** - £150million

- 5\* 285 room Hilton Hotel
- Sky bar at level 23
- Private apartments with roof garden
- further developments now planned for surrounding area including commercial space

### U2 Tower Dublin



**Height:** 120m

**Floors:** 35

**Status:** Planning Approved (due to begin in 2008)

**Type** – Residential

**Cost** - €200million

- Situated in the Docklands area of Dublin
- A 5\* hotel is due to be completed adjacent to the site as well as a block of social and affordable housing





**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Gasworks Estate :- (a) additional floor for Ormeau Gasworks Ltd Plot 4 (b) road safety measures
<b>Date:</b>	April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Mr Gerry Millar Director of Improvement Ext. 3494
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Mr Adrian Ferguson Estates Surveyor Ext 3503

**Relevant Background Information**

**(a) additional floor for Ormeau Gasworks Ltd Plot 4**

Members are reminded that Council entered into a Master Development Agreement with Ormeau Gasworks Ltd dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1999 for development of six plots with the Gasworks Estate.

At its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2005 the Development Committee approved an initial revision of the specified floor space in respect of Plot 4 to construct an office building with a total floor area of approximately 25,500 sq feet over four floors.

Upon completion of the building Council granted Ormeau Gasworks Ltd a 250 year Lease from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2006 who immediately in turn effectively sold the completed development to Tullyraine Ltd. This sale reserved a reviewable ground rent payable to Council which reflects the lettable floor space of the building. Currently Council receive an annual rent of £26,000 per annum.

It is believed that Tullyraine Ltd have agreed terms with DFP (Industrial Tribunals Office - ITO) for a 15 year term for the entire building as it stands. DFP have requested the provision of additional space, through the addition of a further floor, in order to fully meet the operational needs of the ITO.

Ormeau Gasworks Ltd submitted a planning application for construction of an additional and fifth floor on Plot 4 and formally sought Council's consent for this variation to the originally approved development. The addition of a fifth floor will add a further 5,670 sq feet of office space to Plot 4 (**Appendix 1** – sketch proposals)

**(b) road safety measures**

At its meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> June 2005 the Developmet Committee were advised that a report had been commissioned from Kirk McClure & Morton (now RPS Consulting Engineers) to assess disabled access within the Estate and examine the need for additional road safety measures resulting from increased volume of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Some recommendations have already been addressed such as a right turn filter on the traffic signals from Ormeau Avenue (Roads Service), an additional exit lane and pedestrian crossing at the main entrance of the Estate (£3,700) In addition the developer of the Klondyke Building provided an enhanced turning head at his cost under instruction from the Estate Management Unit.

In order to complete the DDA compliance work identified within the RPS Report it has been agreed that Ormeau Gasworks Ltd carry out installation of the "wheelchair friendly" access on Council land as part of their contract to provide the required access road on adjacent land at Plot 3 (**Appendix 2** – location map)

**Key Issues**

**(a) additional floor for Ormeau Gasworks Ltd Plot 4**

- Clause 5.5.1.2 of the Superior Lease contains an outright prohibition against any alterations to the premises without prior consent from the Council. A premium of £30,000 has been agreed for a specific variation of the Clause.
- Planning permission has now been secured for the addition of a further floor providing approximately 5,670 sq feet of additional office accommodation. In addition to the statutory neighbourhood notification Council officers have also canvassed opinion from Inislyn Ltd whose hotel development (Radisson SAS) will be affected – they had no particular objections.
- Consarc, Council's consultant architects, reviewed an additional fifth floor on Plot 4 and confirmed broad support for the proposals having considered the effect on the Estate in terms of its architectural merit.
- Parks have confirmed no objection to the increased height given the proximity of a taller building and its effect on natural light to the existing areas of adjoining landscaping.
- This building has remained vacant since its completion in April 2006. Consent to the additional floor will progress upgrading and completion of the occupational fit-out and finish outstanding exterior works including a new entrance porch, automatic vehicular access barrier, completion of external lighting, surfacing and landscaping schemes.
- Permission had previously granted approval to the location of an NIE sub-station on Plot 4 which still requires construction of a suitable structure that will provide appropriate screening. Ormeau Gasworks Ltd have yet to complete the scheme, for which approval has been given, that provides a suitable screening solution. Council consent to construct additional floor onto the existing building would require the NIE sub-station to be screened.

**(b) road safety measures**

- The work required to provide a "wheelchair friendly" route is needed to comply with DDA requirements. The opportunity exists to have this work undertaken by Ormeau Gasworks Ltd who has an obligation to provide a quality shared access route linking the main pedestrian access to the rest of the Estate.



- Ormeau Gasworks Ltd have negotiated a price with Marmic (used recently by Council for upgrading the City centre entries) Disability Action has also been engaged by the Developer to endorse the scheme design.
- Council's Landscape Planning and Development Unit, who were responsible for design of the Gasworks public realm, have approved the design of both schemes using high quality natural Caithness stone finishes.
- PMU have confirmed Marmic as an appropriate contractor to undertake this nature of work and that the following negotiated prices represent value for money (all of the project fees are being absorbed by the Developer)
  - Total Contract £170,768
  - Council Works £25,597 (approx 15%)
- Included within the above cost is the repair of broken and damaged sandstone on Limetree Walk will also be replaced with more durable Caithness stone specifically designed to meet the recent DDA recommendations.
- Based on report from PMU this appointment has been endorsed by Council's Procurement Unit.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

- Ormeau Gasworks Ltd have agreed to payment of a premium of £30,000 to vary the terms of their Lease and secure the required Council consent.
- Council will take the benefit of an uplift in the annual equity rent from Plot 4 attributable to the increased floor area. This is estimated at approximately £7,000 per annum additional income.
- The cost associated with the road safety and DDA works will be funded from the Gasworks Estate rental income with some elements such as the pedestrian crossing recharged to the Estate's tenants through the annual service charge.

#### Asset and Other Implications

- Approval of an additional floor for Plot 4 could lead to other requests from Developers in the Gasworks to intensify development of other already completed plots.
- In addition to the payment of a premium Council's consent is conditional upon completion of the approved screening of the NIE sub-station as part of the contract to construct the additional floor.
- Compliance with DDA recommendations for the Estate.

### **Recommendations**

#### **(a) additional floor for Ormeau Gasworks Ltd Plot 4**

Members are asked to approve the addition of a further and fifth floor to the existing development on Plot 4 subject to payment of a premium of £30,000 and further terms and conditions to be agreed by the Estates Management Unit.

#### **(b) road safety measures**

Members are requested to note the works undertaken to date and to approve the initiation of works to provide DDA improvements to the existing road/footpath

infrastructure in the Gasworks Estate as detailed above including endorsement of the tender process identified for the completion of these works.

**Key to Abbreviations**

DFP – Department of Finance and Personnel  
ITO – Industrial Tribunals Office  
NIE – Northern Ireland Electricity  
DDA – Disability Discrimination Act  
PMU – Project Management Unit

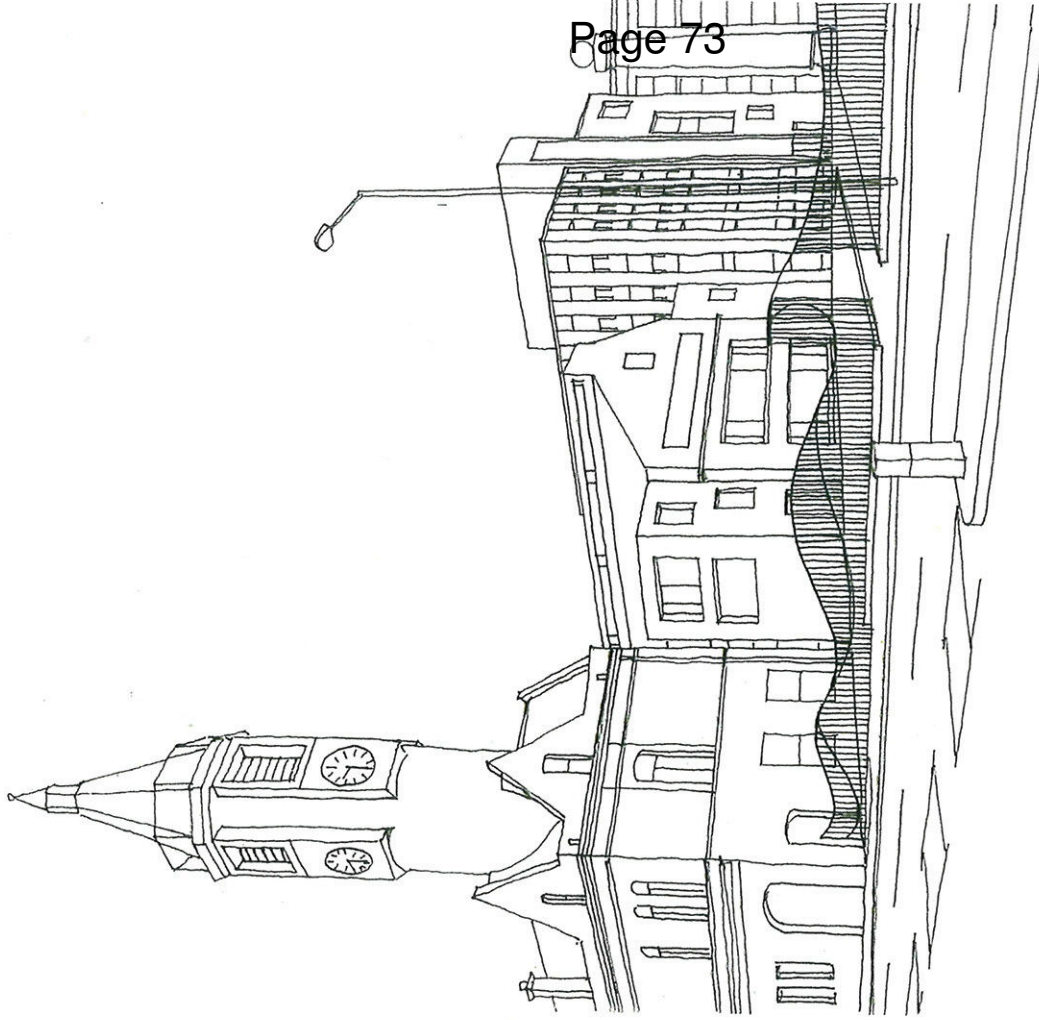
**Documents Attached**

**Appendix 1** – sketch proposals for Plot 4  
**Appendix 2** – location map of DDA works

# Appendix 1



EXISTING



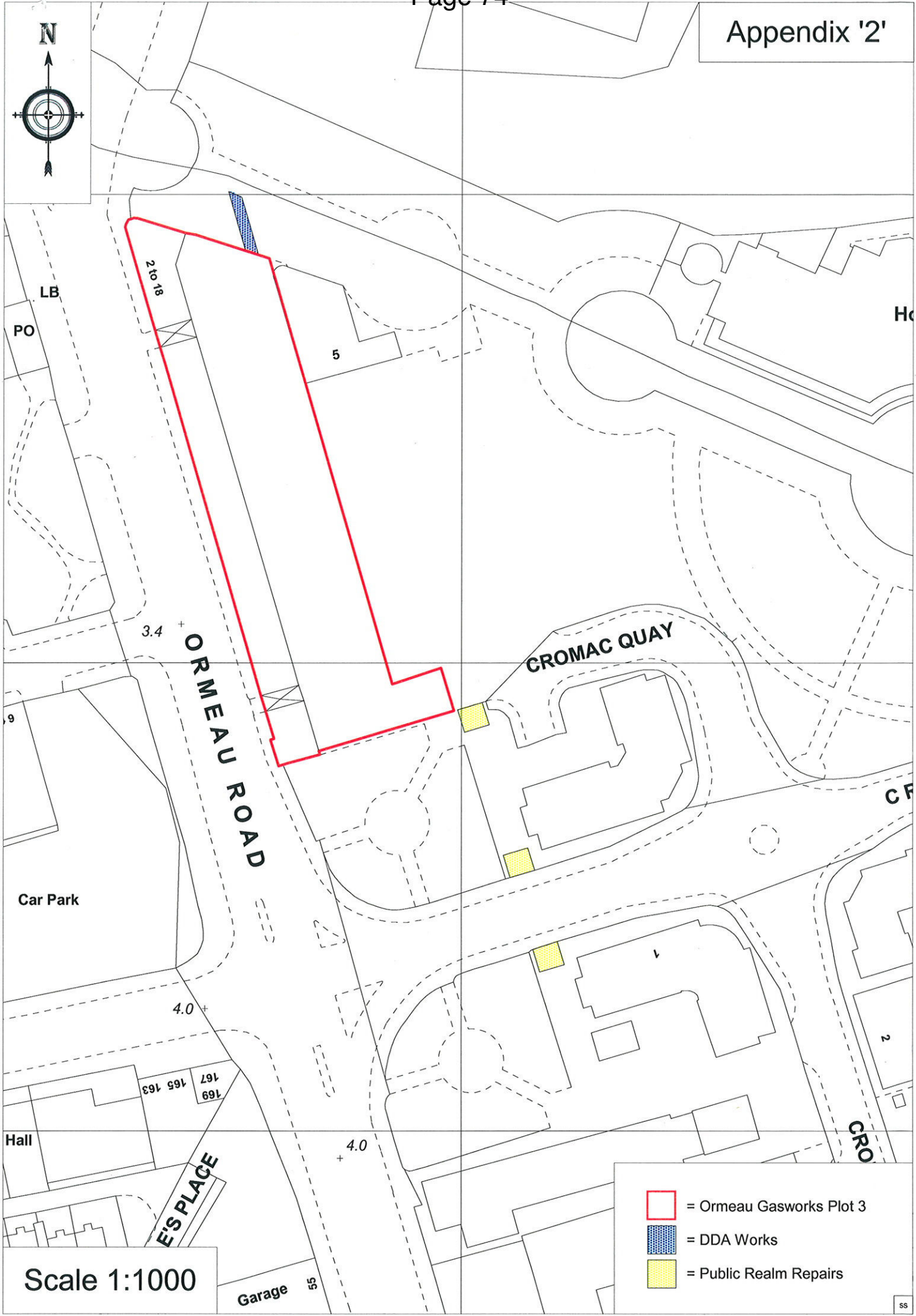
PROPOSED




ORMEAU GASWORKS PLOT4  
PROPOSED EXTENSION  
NOV 2007

twenty two over seven  
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

THE ORMEAU BATHS  
BELFAST  
BT2 8HS  
NORTHERN IRELAND

tel: 02890 322726 fax: 02890 237397  
email: [twentytwooverseven.co.uk](mailto:twentytwooverseven.co.uk)



-  = Ormeau Gasworks Plot 3
-  = DDA Works
-  = Public Realm Repairs

Scale 1:1000



### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Capital Programme: Blythefield Open Space - Changing Accommodation and Multi Use Games Area
<b>Date:</b>	18 April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Michael Stanley, Project Manager

#### Relevant Background Information

As reported previously, the Council's Capital Programme has yet to be politically prioritised to ensure that the Programme and the City Investment Strategy meet Members' political priorities and are delivered in the context of affordable financial limits set by Members' decisions on the level of the rate.

At the moment there are a large number of schemes in the draft programme which have been put forward by various Committees over a number of years on an ongoing basis.

A series of briefings are being carried out during April for Party Groups to consider a draft Capital Programme and Finance along with City Investment and Asset Strategies.

#### Key Issues

There are however some projects which Departments wish to move forward for various reasons.

One such proposal is for the construction of the Changing Accommodation and a Multi Use Games Area at Blythefield Open Space, which was initiated in 2005 by the Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries Services) Sub-Committee.

In November 2006 the Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries Services) Sub-Committee granted authority to proceed with the proposal subject to the cost of

the project being 100% funded by the Belfast Regeneration Office.

The design has since been developed and tender documentation has been prepared as part of an application for grant funding which is currently being considered by the Belfast Regeneration Office.

This proposal is "*urgent*" in the sense that the work is programmed to commence in the early summer, subject to a positive outcome on the funding application, and if it does not proceed shortly the funding may be lost.

It is proposed that tenders, when invited, will be evaluated on the basis of quality and cost in order to ascertain that which offers the most economically advantageous bid for the works.

### **Resource Implications**

This capital proposal will only proceed with 100% external financial support.

The draft capital programme for 08/09 includes a gross amount £825,000 (nett £nil) for this proposal.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to consider this proposal and determine whether Officers should proceed with the invitation of tenders and award of a contract.

**Extract from minutes of Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries Services) Sub-Committee, Tuesday, 28th November, 2006**

**Blythefield Open Space –  
Tender for the Construction of  
Changing Accommodation and a Multi-Use Games Area**

The Sub-Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th February, it had granted approval to undertake the design, tendering process and management of the contract on-site through to completion of the above-mentioned project at Blythefield Open Space.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries reported that, to enable the construction work to be completed in a timely manner, it was necessary to seek delegated authority to approve a select list of contractors from whom tenders would be sought and subsequently approve the most advantageous tender for the construction of changing accommodation and a multi-use games area at the site. He stated that an amount of £655,000 had been included within the Draft Capital Programme for 2007/2008 for this project, for which 100% grant-aid was anticipated from the Belfast Regeneration Office.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Sub-Committee grant the delegated authority sought to the Director of Community and Recreation and the Head of Parks and Cemeteries Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Community and Recreation Committee.

The Sub-Committee adopted the recommendation, subject to the cost of the project being 100% grant aided by the Belfast Regeneration Office.







## BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>City Hall grounds tours – pilot implementation</b>
<b>Date:</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	George Wright – Head of Facilities Management
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	As above

### Relevant background information

Members will be aware that the Council has sought to ensure that citizens of the city, visitors and tourists are made aware that the closure of the City Hall is a temporary situation and that the grounds very much remain open as usual. The Big Wheel, the Christmas Market and the Proms are just some of the high-profile events which contribute very positively to this message.

Members will also be aware that the public tours of the City Hall have, for some time, been one of the principal tourist attractions in the city, and that tour participant numbers had increased to almost 60,000 per annum by the closure date. It is clearly important to try to minimise the adverse effects of the closure on the ongoing popularity of tours when the City Hall re-opens, and also to look for additional ways in which to emphasize that the grounds remain open as usual.

One potentially effective way of achieving both objectives is to organize tours of the City Hall grounds, and following COMT endorsement of this proposal some initial research has been undertaken and some modest expenditure already incurred in order to develop the proposal outlined below.

It should be noted that the proposed tours would seek to tell the story of the city generally and would not be limited solely to items located in the grounds, but the tour content seeks to link all of these references back to the City Hall as the focal point of Belfast's political, social and cultural development over the last century. The script was devised by a professional researcher and copywriter, Seth Linder, on foot of a quotation exercise.

The initial proposal is that 2 tours each week-day be offered, lasting approximately 45 minutes each, based on the script referred to above. The tours would, if approved, be available on a pilot basis from May until September 2008, and their continued provision could then be reviewed.

In terms of resources, Members will be aware that the Facilities Management Section currently employs 2 permanent tour staff, usually supplemented by an agency employee at times of peak demand. However in the light of the City Hall closure we have recently agreed to release the 2 permanent staff on secondment for 2 days per week at the request of the NI Assembly, in order to conduct private tours of that

building. This, combined with the fact that these staff already have a detailed programme of work to complete during the closure period and also because of some related health and welfare issues, would mean that the proposed grounds tours could not be delivered directly by BCC staff.

It would therefore be necessary to recruit and train additional agency staff for the duration of the pilot scheme, with existing BCC tour staff assisting in staff training, administration and providing cover for sickness & holidays etc. As a consequence of this there would be additional expenditure associated with the pilot scheme of approximately **£8,525**.

Clearly, if the proposed tours are to proceed, it will be necessary to recruit and train the relevant staff as soon as possible in order to begin to offer the tours to the public during May 2008.

### **Key Issues**

The principal issue is whether or not Members are of the opinion that the proposed tours would have the effect of ensuring some degree of continuity in terms of tourism and of keeping the City Hall in the public eye until it re-opens, and would therefore be a positive development.

If so, then clearly some additional costs will be associated with the tours, so another key issue is whether or not Members would wish to see these costs recouped (wholly or in part) by the introduction of a charge, or whether the associated costs should be absorbed by the Council for the duration of the pilot scheme and reviewed thereafter.

By way of illustration, on the basis of 2 tours per day (morning and afternoon – Mon-Fri) for a period of 20 weeks with a maximum number per tour of 25 people and an overall average take-up rate of 70%, a charge of **£2.10** per person would recoup all associated costs. The take-up of the tours would, of course, be kept under review and if necessary additional afternoon or Saturday tours could quite easily be added in order to cope with any unmet demand.

Issues may, however, arise in respect of levying flat charges on particular categories of tour participant, notably senior citizens, the unemployed and schools. Consequently, the Committee may wish to consider a base charge of **£3.00** per person, which would permit the offering of concessionary pricing resulting in up to 40% reductions for senior citizens, school-groups and the unemployed.

The Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau has confirmed that it can provide booking and administration facilities in respect of the tours, together with cash-handling if the Committee is minded to introduce a charge, and that it can accommodate either fixed or concessionary pricing.

### **Resources Implications**

#### Financial

Additional expenditure of **£8,575** would be required, although this could be wholly or partially offset by the introduction of a charge for the tours.

Human Resources

Agency staff would be required to supplement the existing tour staff resources.

Asset & other implications

There are no direct asset implications in respect of this report.

**Recommendations & Decisions**

It is recommended that the Committee approve the provision of City Hall grounds tours on the basis of the content and format set out above.

The Committee is requested to decide whether or not a charge ought to be levied for the pilot scheme and, if so, whether this ought to be a flat charge for all participants or on the basis of concessionary charging for appropriate groups.

**Key to Abbreviations**

None

**Documents attached**

Proposed tour script?



**GOOD RELATIONS STEERING PANEL****MINUTES OF MEETING****FRIDAY, 4th APRIL, 2008**

- Members present: Councillor Long (Chairman); and  
Councillors C. Maskey, Humphrey (nominee of  
Councillor McCausland) and Stoker.
- External Members: Canon B. Dodds, Church of Ireland;  
Mr. P. Scott, Catholic Church;  
Mr. Galway, Bombardier Aerospace; and  
Dr. D. Morrow, Community Relations Council.
- In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;  
Ms. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;  
Miss C. Wilson, Conflict Transformation Project Manager;  
Miss E. Brough, Good Relations Officer; and  
Mr. J. Heaney, Committee Administrator.

**Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Hanna, Kyle, McCausland and Ms. H. Smith.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 7th March were taken as read and signed as correct.

**Special European Union Programmes Body – Peace III**

The Good Relations Manager reminded the Steering Panel that, at its meeting on 7th March, it had agreed that an invitation be forwarded to Mr. P. Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special European Union Programmes Body, to attend a meeting of the Steering Panel in order to discuss the Members' concerns in relation to the Council's Peace and Reconciliation Plan. She reported that Mr. Colgan was in attendance and he was welcomed to the meeting by the Chairman.

Mr. Colgan advised the Steering Panel that he had considered the Council's Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan and was confident that it had met all the requirements. Accordingly, he indicated that he looked forward to working with the Council in the coming years in regard to the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan. He stated that on the 12th and 13th May the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) would be considering the action plans received from all Councils and he was confident that all outstanding matters could be addressed at that time. He suggested that a letter of offer could be made by May/June which would permit the Council to start the recruitment exercise in respect of the additional staff required for the implementation of the Plan as soon as possible thereafter. He stated also that he wished to put on record his appreciation of the work carried out by the Council in relation to the preparation of the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan.

The Chairman indicated that there were still a number of concerns to be addressed, namely, that no Good Relations Partnership was yet in place and she stated that staff should not be put in the position which would necessitate them making decisions which should properly be made by the Good Relations Partnership. Furthermore, she stated that the requirement for the Council to identify those groups which would be in a position to receive funding could create the perception in the wider community that they were being treated in a more favourable manner.

In response, Mr. Colgan stated that the SEUPB was trying to achieve a balance in that there was a need to develop a sound rationale for the allocation of the funds which, therefore, would require an economic appraisal to be undertaken by all applicants. He stated that the Plan would need to indicate specifically where the funding would be allocated and what were the objectives and outcomes which were expected to be achieved. However, he indicated that this would not be restrictive and that any letter of offer from the Programmes Body would be flexible and would permit the Partnership to redistribute funds. He indicated further that the description of the Partnership contained within the Plan was very good and could be built upon in a flexible manner in order to allow issues to be addressed as they arose.

A number of Members indicated that they were concerned in relation to the differences in the level of financial resources which the Panel had been working towards when developing its Plan and the levels which were now being indicated as being available from the Programmes Body.

Mr. Colgan explained that, whilst he was aware that there were a number of problems specific to Belfast, he was constrained by the European Union budget which had been allocated to the Project. However, he indicated that he would work closely with the Panel in regard to the level of funding which would be made available to the Council.

The Chairman pointed out that the Panel was of the view that there was a very significant case for Belfast to receive additional money, since the City was unique, not only because it had suffered a disproportionate share of violence over the past 35 years, but in so far as it had a good record on good relations issues and had, in the past, demonstrated its capacity to deliver specific projects. She stated that there was currently a high degree of stability within Belfast City Council, compared with other organisations, which would be of vital importance in delivering the Plan's objectives.

The Chief Executive indicated that there was a firm foundation for the framework of the Plan which had been developed by both Members and officers of the Council. He indicated further that the Council was working with other statutory and voluntary bodies, in a partnership approach, in order to promote good relations throughout Belfast. He suggested that the launch of the Peace and Reconciliation Plan and, indeed the forthcoming visit by Members of the Council to Chicago, would be an ideal opportunity to instigate a wider dialogue about good relations and community cohesion issues.

Mr. Colgan thanked the Committee for receiving him and he retired from the meeting.

The Chief Executive suggested that it would be important for the new Partnership to commence work as soon as possible and, accordingly, he recommended that a provisional date be agreed for the first meeting of the Partnership to be held during the week commencing 16th June, 2008.

After further discussion, the Steering Panel noted the information which had been provided and adopted the recommendation of the Chief Executive.

**Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan – Peace III**

The Good Relations Manager advised the Members that a number of the concerns which had been expressed by the Community Relations Council and Border Action in relation to the Plan had been addressed and further information had been included within the revised Plan, including indicative actions, outputs, targets and expected results. She indicated further that the final decision on specific funding allocations would be taken by the new Partnership, when established.

She advised the Panel further that, in relation to Church representation on the proposed Partnership, letters had been forwarded to all churches advising them of the increase in the level of representation and she informed the Members that it was hoped that the various Protestant denominations would agree on a method of selecting the two representatives for the Partnership.

The Steering Panel noted the contents of the revised Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Plan and the comments of the Good Relations Manager thereon and noted also that a copy of the plan would be available for inspection in the Members' library.

**Peace III – Proposed Methodology for the Appointment of Representatives from the Voluntary, Community and Minority Ethnic Sectors for the Good Relations Partnership**

The Steering Panel considered a report in relation to the recruitment of the five representatives from the voluntary, community and minority ethnic sectors for inclusion on the Good Relations Partnership.

The Good Relations Manager outlined the proposed methodology for the recruitment exercise, which involved a two-stage process. The first stage would include the advertising of the positions and the long-listing of candidates. Following this, at an assessment centre, AS Associates would also administer a short written exercise and interview for applicants to demonstrate their abilities against the required competencies. AS Associates would then prepare a report and short-list recommending applicants for the next stage.

Stage 2 would consist of a standard structured interview with questions designed to elicit further information. The panel would consist of two Elected Members and one external Member with AS Associates being present at the interviews in an advisory capacity only. The Good Relations Manager stated that the make-up of the interview panel must have a balance of both gender and community background and participants must have received appropriate training in the Council's recruitment and selection procedures.

After discussion, the Steering Panel approved the two stage process for the recruitment of Good Relations Partnership members and noted that the Special European Union Programmes Body would meet 100% of the costs of the exercise.

**Good Relations Grant-Aid**

The Good Relations Manager submitted for the information of the Panel a report detailing a summary of applications to the Good Relations Grant-Aid Fund, together with the associated recommendations.

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**Good Relations Steering Panel,  
Friday, 4th April, 2008**

After discussion, the Steering Panel agreed unanimously that the recommended grant-aid be awarded under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive to the following organisations:

<u>Reference Number</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommendation £</u>
475/1145	North Belfast Play Forum	10,000
681/1148	St. Colmcille's/Gilnahirk Inter-Church Group	600
267/1155	Ulster Scots Heritage Council	1,650
684/1154	Forthriver Royals	5,350
592/1152	Quaker House	2,500
498/1140	Mandarin Speakers Association	2,000
	PROVISIONAL TOTAL THIS MONTH	22,100

**Love Poetry Hate Racism**

The Steering Panel was advised that Di-Verse was a new organisation which sought to celebrate diversity in Northern Ireland by bringing people together using the poetic arts. The Good Relations Manager advised the Panel that a group of poets living and working in Belfast had, in 2007, organised a world-wide event called Love Poetry Hate Racism which had attracted participants from over fifty cities from around the world to celebrate diversity through poetry.

This year, Di-Verse was organising a similar event to be held during the period from 18th till 20th April and approximately fifty cities from all around the world would be participating. The organisers had invited the Council to support their Belfast event, which aimed to use poetry to explore issues around racism and cultural diversity. The event would seek also to promote the message that the mixing of cultures and the cross-pollination of ideas would have a positive influence on our shared future.

After discussion, the Steering Panel agreed to support the event being staged in Belfast by promoting it through the Council's internal and external network and by permitting the use of the Council's logo on promotional material.

**Mitchell Conference, Queen's University**

The Steering Panel was advised that, in order to mark the 10th anniversary of the signing the Good Friday Agreement and the 100 years since Queen's College Belfast had become a University, the Mitchell Conference was being hosted on Thursday and Friday, 22nd and 23rd May by Queen's University in association with the Georgetown University, Washington DC and Co-operation Ireland. The theme of the Conference would be "Moving on from Conflict: Lessons from Northern Ireland" and Senator George Mitchell would be delivering the opening address. The aim of the Conference was to assist others to learn from the conflict in Northern Ireland and to work towards a resolution of conflict. A number of internationally renowned speakers, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Mary Robinson, the Right Honourable Shaun Woodward, M.P., Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and BBC journalist, Fergal Keane, would be speaking at the Conference.



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The Good Relations Manager indicated that attendance at the Conference would be of benefit to the Council since the sessions would cover topics of interest to the work of the Good Relations Unit and, in particular, the Good Relations Steering Panel. The cost per delegate of attending the Conference would be £195 and an additional charge of £75 would apply to attendance at workshop sessions. She indicated that provision for such expenditure had been made within the Revenue Budget of the Good Relations Unit.

After discussion, it was agreed that the Steering Panel be represented at the Conference by the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Chief Executive and the Good Relations Manager (or their nominees), together with one Member of each of the other Party Groupings not represented by the aforementioned Members.

**Community Relations Week – Showcasing Event**

Miss E. Brough, Good Relations Officer, reminded the Steering Panel that the Community Relations Council had organised an annual Community Relations Week during which organisations, including the Council, working in the field of good relations held individual events related to community relations. The Council event had been scheduled to be held on 30th April at the Europa Hotel at which a range of community, youth and other groups, supported by the Council's Good Relations Fund, would showcase their work. However, the Council had been made aware recently that the Community Relations Council was planning to hold a major conference on the same day at the same venue and, as a result, it was agreed that the Council's event be postponed and held at a later date.

The Good Relations Officer indicated that the aim of the event would be to foster a greater knowledge of the work of the groups and organisations in the area in promoting good relations. She outlined the proposed agenda for the event and indicated that there were no additional charges incurred a result of the event being postponed and re-scheduled to a later date.

After discussion, during which the Good Relations Manager reported that it was proposed to launch an Equality Reference Guide at the event, the Steering Panel agreed that the event be postponed and re-scheduled to be held at the same location in June, 2008.

**On-going Items and Updates**

**Intercultural Week**

The Good Relations Manager reminded the Panel that, as part of Intercultural Week, the Council, in conjunction with the South Belfast Round Table, would be hosting an information event for migrant workers in Belfast at St. George's Market from 5.30 p.m. till 9.00 p.m. on 9th April.

Noted.

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**House of Lords Consultation**

The Panel was reminded that in September 2007 it had submitted a response to the Select Committee on Economic Affairs of the House of Lords in relation to that Committee's investigation on the economic impact of immigration. The Good Relations Manager reported that the committee had now published its findings and tabled an extract of the report. This report had found no evidence that immigration had generated significant economic benefits for the United Kingdom. However, the report had concentrated on economic issues and had explicitly excluded any consideration of cultural or social aspects of immigration. The Good Relations Manager stated that a copy of the full report was available on request from the Good Relations Unit.

Chairman



### Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>CONSULTATION – POST OFFICE NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME NORTHERN IRELAND</b>
<b>Date:</b>	Monday 7th April 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement, ext 6217
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Patricia Flynn, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer, ext 6204

#### Relevant Background Information

##### Purpose

To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee details of a consultation by Post Office Ltd on its Network Change Programme – Area Plan Proposal Northern Ireland. This programme is to implement measures proposed by the Government to modernise and reshape the network of Post Office branches. The consultation runs from 1st April 2008 to 12th May 2008.

##### Background

On 14th December 2006, the Government initiated a 12 week public consultation on a range of proposed measures to modernise and reshape the Post Office branch network and put it on a stable footing.

- The Government committed to providing funding to support the necessary changes to the network and provide continuing support for the social network, including a funding package of £1.7bn;
- Introduced a new framework of minimum access criteria to maintain a national network of Post Offices and to protect vulnerable consumers in deprived urban, rural and remote areas;
- Post Office Ltd is required to take into consideration obstacles such as rivers, mountains and valleys, motorways and sea crossings to islands to avoid undue hardship;
- Post Office Ltd is required to ensure in every postcode district without exception that 95% of the population will be within 6 miles of their nearest post office outlet.

The Network Change Programme has evolved as a result of falling customer numbers, changing customer habits and traditional post office services now being available elsewhere. The original consultation by the Government requested comments from thirteen Northern Ireland based organisations including NILGA.

##### Summary of the Consultation

The consultation document is not about the policy decisions underpinning the Change Programme but rather is seeking local feedback on the Northern Ireland implementation plan. It can be summarised as follows:

- The minimum access criteria set down by the Government in the Response Document.
- The rationale for the changes proposed is falling customer numbers, changing customer habits, many of the traditional Post Office services are available elsewhere, mounting financial losses and the fact that change is needed to ensure the Network has a sustainable future.
- Postwatch have a role in ensuring local consultations is meaningful and to scrutinise the processes undertaken by Post Office Ltd.
- The types of Outreach Services being suggested:
  - Mobile Service – Travelling Post Office within a mobile vehicle.
  - Hosted Service – Provision of post office services at a fixed site during specified hours & days from the premises of a local business or a community building.
  - Partner Service – Provision of post office services at a fixed site through a third party retailer.
  - Home Service – Customers can order post office services and have them delivered direct to

their home or collect from a Drop In site.

- A summary of Post Office branches to be closed and replaced with an Outreach Service, including details of that service, facilities at the Outreach Service and nearby Post Office branches that will provide services and products outside the times proposed by the Outreach Service.
- Post Office branches proposed for closure.
- Post Office branches remaining within the Network.

The Post Office Regional Plan Proposal for Northern Ireland has been developed in consultation with the independent consumer watchdog on postal services, Postwatch and Post Office Ltd asked all local authorities within Northern Ireland to provide information and views on relevant factors for consideration. The Plan proposes:

- To retain a total of 492 Post Offices
- To close 42 existing branches
- To install 54 Outreach services

Comments are sought by Post Office Ltd in particular on:

- The proposal to close the Post Office Branch concerned and replace it with an Outreach Service;
- The type of Outreach Service to be provided;
- The current Outreach Service proposal;
- Whether the extent of the Outreach Service proposed is suitable for the area and community
- Suitable locations for the Outreach Service in the community;
- All other potential Outreach Services for the area and communities concerned;
- Comments on the availability of public transport, alternative access to key Post Office services, local demographics and the impact on customers and the local economy.

## **Key Issues**

### Implications for Belfast

- Of the 54 current Post Office branches to be replaced by Outreach services, none are in the Belfast City Council area.
- There are 42 Post Office branches proposed for closure, 10 of which are in the Belfast City Council area (24% of planned closures). The criteria used to select Post Office branches for closure is:
  - Size of branch – based on the number of customer sessions;
  - Proximity – to other Post Office branches based on road distance between branches;
  - Financial Benefit to Post Office Ltd – net Sub-postmaster pay costs saved, including any business that is predicted to be lost;
  - Relative Size – based on size of branches in the surrounding area.
- The branches to close in the Belfast City Council area are:
  - Belmont, 1 Campbell Park Avenue, Belfast BT4 3FH, Victoria Electoral Area.
  - Blacks Road, 120 Blacks Road, Belfast BT10 0NF, Upper Falls Electoral Area.
  - Carlisle Circus, 14 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 2AA, Oldpark Electoral Area.
  - Cave Hill, 634 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 5GP, Castle Electoral Area.
  - Grosvenor Street, 263 Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 4LL, Lower Falls Electoral Area.
  - Lisburn Road, 217 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7EJ, Balmoral Electoral Area.
  - Orangefield, 276 Castlereagh Road, Belfast BT5 6AD, Pottinger Electoral Area.
  - Ormeau Road, 160 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2ED, Laganbank Electoral Area.
  - Summerhill, 3 Summerhill Avenue, Belfast BT5 7HD, Victoria Electoral Area.

- The Throne, The Throne Centre, Whitewell Road, Belfast BT36 7EX, Castle Electoral Area.
- All of the Post Office branches where changes have been proposed have been visited independently by members of staff from Post Office Ltd and Postwatch to undertake separate detailed assessments and to make sure that all local factors had been considered first hand prior to developing the Regional Proposal.
- Within the Belfast City Council area, 52 Post Office branches will remain in the Network, this equates to 10.6% of the total number branches within the Northern Ireland Network, and almost 34.4% of the proposed future Network available within urban towns and cities across the province.
- Across Northern Ireland, 5.9% of the 1.7 million residents currently use a branch that will close. In considering the relative convenience of alternative branches for these customers, 2% will be within a quarter of one mile of their nearest alternative branch as measured by road distance, 3.1% will have access within half of a mile and one mile and 0.3% will be within one and three miles.
- As Belfast is an urban area the minimum access criteria that the Post Office have applied so that residents will have the best possible service is that (i) 99% of the total population in deprived urban areas (based on Indices of Multiple Deprivation) across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest Post Office branch and (ii) 95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest Post Office branch.
- Across Northern Ireland, 30.3% of the region's total population live in deprived communities, 20.4% of them in urban areas and 9.9% in rural areas. The Network Change Programme set out in this consultation document, provides for 68 branches being located in urban deprived communities across the province.
- Whilst ten Post Office branches will be closed in the Belfast area, according to the consultation document, these closures are within the minimum criteria prescribed by the Government in the Response Document and affected customers meet the access criteria set down. It is unlikely that the branches facing closure in the Belfast area will have this decision overturned as implementation plans meet the needs of residents while delivering modernisation and efficiency.
- A detailed impact assessment has been undertaken by Post Office Ltd and copies of the analysis of Post Office branches from the Belfast area will be sent to party group leaders for them to review and respond with individual comments.
- There are aspects of the current proposal that Postwatch have raised concerns about which should be reiterated, specifically:
  - The ability for disabled, low income and elderly customers to continue accessing postal services in certain areas if the proposal to close their local post office goes ahead,
  - Closing nearby branches in busy urban areas, leaving unacceptable gaps in the remaining network,
  - The potential impact on customer service at remaining branches, for example increased queuing times,
  - The quality of disabled access at a number of receiving branches,
  - Local historical community boundaries.
- The Outreach Service will not apply in the Belfast City area.

## Further Details

The original public consultation document carried out by the Post Office on the Network (December 2006) and the Government's subsequent response to the consultation (May 2007) that has led to the Network Change Programme can be found on the Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform website in the consultations section, [www.berr.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.berr.gov.uk/consultations). Post Office Ltd welcome all views & comments regarding future access to Post Office services by the following methods:

Freepost Address: Sheila McCann, Network Development Officer, C/O National Consultation Team, FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM

Email: [consultation@postoffice.co.uk](mailto:consultation@postoffice.co.uk)

Customer Helpline: 08457 22 33 44

All responses should be forwarded to Post Office Ltd by 12 May 2008.

<b>Resource Implications</b>
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n/a
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<b>Recommendations</b>
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Members are asked to approve the attached draft response letter from Belfast City Council. Postwatch have requested that they also be sent a copy of the Council's response to help inform their final view on the proposals.
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It is recommended that the consultation document and the details of the 10 Post offices to close in the BCC area be referred to the Party Groups on the Council for individual consideration and comment to enable Members representing those areas affected by a closure to respond with any additional local circumstances or issues which should be taken into account by Post Office Ltd. Local members may also wish to contact Postwatch for more information or concerning any queries they might have on the consultation process.
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<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
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<b>Documents Attached</b>
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APPENDIX 1: Draft copy of response letter to Post Office Ltd
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**APPENDIX 1**

Dear Ms McCann,

**Re: Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme – Area Plan Proposal Northern Ireland**

Thank you for your letter of March 31<sup>st</sup> regarding the Regional Plan Proposal for Northern Ireland that is part of the Network Change Programme to reshape and modernise the Post Office Network.

With respect to the proposed closures in the Belfast area, the Council is concerned that a number of the closures are in constituencies with a high concentration of areas of deprivation. Care should be taken that closures do not impact adversely on those most in need in our city.

Much of the media focus has been on rural communities and the associated impact of closures; however Belfast City Council would suggest that the Post Office would be mindful of the fact that urban communities are equally affected by access, particularly groups such as the elderly, those with mobility issues and residents in deprived areas. In addition taking into account the divided nature of parts of the city, this can have amplified implications on the socially excluded groups already mentioned.

Belfast City Council acknowledges the economic considerations behind the proposed closures to support and reshape the Network for the future and ensure the Network's continued viability, however Belfast City Council seeks assurances that residents requirements will continue to be met by the Post Office Network, especially the most vulnerable and socially excluded sections of the community so that these groups are not adversely affected.

The detailed impact assessment undertaken by Post Office Ltd and copies of the analysis of Post Office branches from the Belfast area has been sent to individual party groups on the Council for them to review and respond with comments in line with their local knowledge and familiarity with the needs of local people.

As the Outreach Service will not apply in the Belfast City area however, we feel it would not be appropriate for us to comment on its applicability.

Thank you for keeping Belfast City Council informed of the current position.

