

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 20th June, 2008

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor D. Dodds (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor D. Browne); and
Councillors M. Browne, Convery, Crozier, Kirkpatrick,
Lavery, Long, P. Maskey, McCann, Newton, Rodway,
Smyth and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Improvement;
Mr. C. Quigley, Director of Legal Services;
Mr. T. Salmon, Director of Corporate Services;
Mr. L. Steele, Head of Committee and Members'
Services; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Hartley) and Councillor Maginness.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd June.

Modernisation and Improvement

Review of Public Administration - Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Review of Public Administration:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 As Members will recall, on 31st March, 2008 the Environment Minister, Arlene Foster MLA made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the final recommendations of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and the future shape of Local Government within Northern Ireland. In her speech, the Minister stated that the current 26 District Councils would be reduced to 11 and a range of additional functions would transfer to Councils.**

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1** Members will accept that the Minister's announcement is only the start of the process and the size of the challenge ahead for local government cannot be underestimated. Ensuring that appropriate consideration is given to the outworking of the Review of Public Administration recommendations is crucial.
- 2.2** The fact that the focus to date of the local government sector has been very much on discussing the functions to transfer to local government, little attention has been given to the actual practicalities of how the restructuring and significant change process resulting from the RPA would be taken forward and managed whilst ensuring that business as usual and service standards are maintained. Whether or not the RPA produces the intended benefits depends as much on how effectively it is implemented as on the exact nature of the reform.
- 2.3** It is clear that a level of sophistication needs to be built into the RPA implementation process and active discussion between local government, Ministers and officials from transferring Departments must ensue to ensure that the practicalities attached to the reconfiguration of Councils from 26 to 11 and the transfer of new functions to emerging Councils is taken into consideration and informs the implementation process.
- 2.4** There are a number of strands of work currently underway which seeks to provide greater clarity on the necessary process for the effective implementation of the RPA including the development of a detailed programme of work, the articulation of appropriate delivery structures and, importantly, how its delivery could be resourced. For example:
- The DoE Local Government Reform Unit has commissioned Deloitte to prepare a Strategic Outline Business Case for Local Government Modernisation which it is intended would be used to make bids to DFP to secure necessary funding to support local government reform.
 - PriceWaterhouseCoopers has been appointed by the Society of Local Government Chief Executive's (SOLACE) to develop a high level road map and practical framework to support the implementation and management of the RPA process. It is intended that this work would identify, from a sector perspective, the scope of work required, the key

milestones in the process, possible delivery options for taking forward necessary strands of activity and the associated resource implications.

- 2.5 It is anticipated that these strands of work would be developed over the summer with the emerging findings becoming available in September. This would provide greater clarity on the direction of the RPA process and would aid to inform the Council's own consideration of how it takes forward the implementation of the RPA and develop an organisation 'fit to lead and serve' and use the greater place shaping powers it will have post RPA.

Members will recall that the Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 18th April, had agreed to commission an independent scoping paper which sets out the key implementation issues for Belfast City Council and informs the development of corporate positions on RPA related issues such as the organisations readiness for change; the necessary skills, capacity and resources required to successfully manage the transition process; the transfer and integration of new functions; the impact on organisational structures etc.

- 2.6 In order to ensure that a prudent approach is taken to both the Council's consideration and implementation of the RPA, it is intended that the commissioning of this work would be appropriately scheduled to ensure that the findings of the independent work being undertaken by Deloitte and PriceWaterhouseCoopers informs this work.

2.7 Delivery Structures

- 2.7.1 In terms of delivery structures, Members will be aware that the DoE has established a two-tier model, consisting of a Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) and three Policy Development Panels (PDPs), to take forward the implementation of the RPA. It is proposed that the SLB would fulfil the role of Council providing overall direction to the process and the PDPs would fulfil the role of Council Committees. A series of task and finish working groups will be established principally comprising of officers from both central and local government. The working groups would be tasked with undertaking the detailed work programmes and reporting back to the SLB and PDPs.

- 2.7.2 Given the breadth and complexity of the issues which are to be taken forward by the PDPs and the far reaching impact of any emerging recommendations in terms of structures, processes and policies, it is crucial that the Council is appropriately represented and actively engaged, at both

elected Member and officer level, within both the SLB and PDPs. It is important that Belfast ensures that its experience and expertise in the areas to be considered by the PDPs (e.g. performance management, improvement, estates etc) informs the process of discussion to ensure that the best interests of Belfast City Council and the wider local government sector is secured.

2.7.3 Members will note that Belfast City Council is represented on both Strand A 'Governance' and Strand B 'Service Delivery' of the PDPs but has no political representation on Strand C 'Support Functions'. Members will note that a number of Council officers have been asked to support the work of the relevant work streams of the three PDPs and are based on the Council's initial officer engagement with the original RPA Thematic Working Groups.

2.7.4 Internal support structures will be put in place to ensure that both those Members and officers engaged within the PDPs are given the appropriate level of support they require to examine in detail emerging issues and develop a corporate position. It is important also that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee are kept updated on the work of the SLB and PDPs and where necessary direction sought.

2.8 Ministerial Changes

2.8.1 Members will note that Minister Sammy Wilson, MLA has replaced Arlene Foster as the Minister with responsibility for the Department of the Environment. Accordingly, taking forward the implementation of the local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration will rest within the remit of Minister Wilson.

3.0 Resource Implications

Whilst there is clearly Human Resource implications attached to the Council's ongoing involvement within the RPA process and, in particular, its engagement within the SLB and PDPs it will be difficult to quantify until a detailed programme of work is put in place.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and agree that appropriate Council Members and officers support the reform process."

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Democratic Services and Governance

**Application of Delegated Powers
to the Licensing Committee**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that, as part of the Council’s review of governance in June, 2007, a Licensing Committee was established to:

1. bring about sustainable decision-making in regard to the grant, transfer or variation of Entertainments Licences and Amusements Permits in a more efficient time frame;
2. address the concerns of the public in respect of licensing issues in a more timely manner;
- 3 assist Members in producing more robust decisions which were legally defensible;
- 4 reduce the time taken to arrive at a corporate decision in regard to licences and permits; and
5. ensure that all parties could expect a full and proper hearing as provided for by the Human Rights Act 1998.

In order to assist the Committee in these aims, the Council granted delegated authority for determining matters in relation to:

- (i) the grant, renewal, transfer, variation, suspension and revocation of Entertainments Licences and the grant, renewal, transfer, variation and revocation of Licences for Sex Establishments;
- (ii) the grant of Amusements Permits and Pleasure Permits and for the Registration of Societies in relation to the running of Lotteries;
- (iii) the designation of streets or parts thereof for the purpose of street trading and the grant, renewal, transfer, variation and revocation of stationary, mobile and temporary street trading licenses and the setting of Licence fees
- (iv) the administration of the provisions of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 which relate to entertainments and liquor licensing in licensed premises and registered clubs; and

- (v) such other licensing matters as the Director of Health & Environmental Services considers appropriate to be addressed by the Committee.

In addition, the Director of Health and Environmental Services has delegated power in relation to the issue (but not refusal) of permits and licences where no adverse representations have been made and the Police Service of Northern Ireland has not offered any objections to the application. The Director, in consultation with the Director of Legal Services, also has the option of referring back for further consideration any decision made by the Committee. This power is supposed to be employed in situations where relevant information, which it is considered would have impacted on the Committee's decision had it been known at the time or where legal advice can demonstrate that a decision taken is likely to be overturned on appeal, becomes available after the Committee has made a decision.

At the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee meeting on 23rd May and again at the Council meeting on 2nd June, a degree of concern was expressed by a number of Members at the use of the Licensing Committee's delegated authority. The Committee requested that a report on these matters be submitted for consideration at its meeting on 20th June.

Key Issues

In considering the matter, there would appear to be three main options open to the Committee. The first option is to continue as at present with full delegated authority on licensing matters, the second is to remove all delegated authority and subject all Committee decisions to Council ratification and the third is to restrict the type and/or extent of the delegated authority which the Committee may exercise.

Option 1 – Maintain full delegated authority

The Licensing Committee has been operating effectively for almost one year. It should be borne in mind that 18 applications for entertainments licences have been considered by the Committee since June 2007. The decisions arrived at were agreed unanimously in all cases. With regard to the issue of Amusements permits, only one of the three decided upon was put to a vote, where 8 members voted for and 7 against. Accordingly, there has been a disagreement at Committee on one occasion only in almost an entire year of operation.

Given the quasi judicial nature of the work of the Committee, a representative of the Director of Legal Services is in attendance at all meetings to offer legal advice and direction in order to protect the Council and the individual Members of the Committee. In addition, the Committee, in its early days of operation, established, in conjunction with the officers of the Health & Environmental Services and Legal Services Departments, an information booklet for the Members of the Committee to guide them in the application of their delegated authority.

The Licensing Committee, under its delegated authority, hears deputations from applicants, objectors and the Police in relation to licence applications. The Committee is able to take its decisions without reference to the full Council and this means that the persons forming the deputations have no right of appearance at the monthly Council meetings. If delegated authority were to be removed or restricted then the final decision-making body on applications will cease to be the Licensing Committee and will become the full Council and, accordingly, the applicants, objectors and Police will be able to appear at full Council. This was the practice in previous years and proved to be frustrating for all Members. One of the reasons for granting the delegated authority in the first place was to prevent this “doubling up” of the right of deputations to be heard.

The Director of Legal Services has also expressed his concern that a procedure whereby final decisions are taken at a full Council meeting when many Members voting may not be fully conversant and familiar with all the details of an application would potentially leave the Council open to legal challenge.

Option 2 – Remove all delegated authority

This would have the effect of making the Licensing Committee like most of the other Standing Committees where all decisions require to be ratified by the full Council. This would have the effect of slowing down the decision-making process and would restore the right of deputations to be heard at full Council.

While such a change would provide greater safeguards for the individual Members of the Committee and would ensure that the final decision reached on any application had the backing of the majority of Members of the Council, it is considered that this would be a backward step given that the exercise of delegated authority has in most cases not given any cause for concern. Again, the Director of Legal Services would reiterate the concerns expressed regarding the potential for leaving the Council in a vulnerable position.

Option 3 – Restrict the use of delegated authority

The Council's Town Planning Committee operates a system of delegated authority when considering planning applications which applies only if the decision is unanimous. In other words, if only one Member of the Committee votes against a decision then the matter is referred to the full Council for ratification. A similar system could be introduced for the Licensing Committee so that, if it is decided that unanimous decisions are required before delegated authority is exercised then this will enable one Member to have any application for a licence to be referred to full Council, with the result that the Council meeting will be required if requested to hear deputations from the applicants, the objectors and the Police. However, the same difficulties which have been identified in relation to Option 2 would also apply in this case.

Conclusion

The Directors of Health & Environmental Services and Legal Services are of the opinion that any concerns which Members might have in relation to the propriety of the Council's decision-making process can be dealt with by the development of more robust protocols in relation to the management of the Committee's business without it being necessary to remove the delegated authority granted in June 2007. As noted above, the Director of Legal Services has concerns in relation to potential legal challenges against the Council in the event of a change in the current delegation arrangements, particularly in the context of the possible future transfer of responsibility for intoxicating liquor licensing to Local Government and the resulting increase in the level and complexity of licensing issues which the Council would be required to deal with.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no major financial implications for the Council.

Recommendations

That, in light of the information contained in the report, the Committee agrees to the adoption of Option 1 for the operation of the Licensing Committee, that is, the retention of full delegated authority."

After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed, to enable adequate safeguards to be provided, to defer consideration of the matter to allow a further report to be submitted to the Licensing Committee providing detailed legal advice on the management of risk faced by the Members of that Committee in administering the decision-making process and the protocols which would be required to be introduced to

enable its business to be managed without it being necessary to remove or amend the authority which had been delegated to it in June, 2007.

Requests for the Provision of Hospitality

The Committee was advised that the undernoted requests for the provision of hospitality had been received:

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Belfast Old Instonians Association	Belfast Old Instonians Association Centenary Dinner 11th March, 2011 Approximately 400 attending	Use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre- dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Belfast Old Instonians Association and to acknowledge the contribution of the organisation to the general life and well-being of the city.	Use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,600 Approximate budget remaining £186,560
Queen's University Territorial Army Officers' Training Corps	Gala Dinner Celebrating 100 Years of Service 11th October, 2008 Approximately 500 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Queen's University Officers' Training Corps and to acknowledge the contribution of the organisation to the general life and well-being of the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks. Approximate cost £2,000 Approximate budget remaining £184,560
Association of British Academic Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons	Annual Scientific Meeting of British Academic Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons 11th November, 2009 Approximately 60 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a drinks reception.	It is estimated that 60 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks. Approximate cost £240 Approximate budget remaining £184,320
Queen's University Belfast	Queen's University Belfast Centenary Dinner 18th September, 2008 Approximately 200 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a Civic Dinner.	This event seeks to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Queen's University Belfast and to acknowledge the contribution of the organisation to the general life and well-being of the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of a Civic Dinner Approximate Cost £7,000 Approximate budget remaining £177,320

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Replacement of Lord Mayor's Vehicle

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 23rd May, it had agreed to defer consideration of a report seeking authority to invite tenders for the replacement of the Lord Mayor's vehicle to enable a further report providing details on the cost efficiency of renewing the vehicle after three years, five years and ten years to be submitted to the meeting scheduled to be held on 20th June.

Accordingly, the Head of Committee and Members' Services submitted a report which provided details in this regard.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Rodway,
Seconded by Councillor Crozier,

That the Committee agrees to rescind the decision of the former Policy and Resources Committee of 16th November, 2001 to replace the Lord Mayor's vehicle after every three years and accordingly that it be replaced every five years.

On a vote by show of hands five Members voted for the proposal and eight against it was accordingly declared lost.

The Committee agreed to approve the invitation of tenders for the replacement of the Lord Mayor's vehicle on a similar, though updated, specification to the current car and that the vehicle be renewed every three years thereafter.

Allowances for the Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and High Sheriff for 2008/2009

The Head of Committee and Members' Services informed the Committee that it had been the practice for the Entertainment and Personal Allowances paid to the Lord Mayor, the Deputy Lord Mayor and the High Sheriff to be reviewed annually to take into account increases in the cost of living and other factors.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee approve the increasing of the Lord Mayor's Personal and Entertainments Allowances to £33,200 and £24,700 respectively and the Deputy Lord Mayor's and the High Sheriff's Personal and Entertainments Allowances to £5,000 and £700 respectively. All of the recommended increases in the Allowances represented an inflationary increase of 3% approximately.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Finance

Annual Governance Statement 2007/08

The Committee was advised that the Local Government (Account and Audit) Regulations 2006 and the Local Government (Account and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations 2006 required the Council to publish a statement of Internal Control along with the Annual Accounts for the year ended 2007/08. Subsequently, however, on 29th February, 2008, the Department of the Environment had issued circular guidance which required public bodies, in line with Local Authorities in England, to prepare an

Annual Governance Statement in 2007/08, without having previously completed a Statement of Internal Control. The Statement was consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives' Framework entitled "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government".

The Director of Corporate Services reported that some aspects of the Statement of Internal Control would be carried forward to the Annual Governance Statement. However, the aforementioned Statement provided additional requirements and therefore Local Government bodies were required to disclose one of the following in relation to the additional requirements:

- compliance;
- intention to comply by 1st April, 2009 (or earlier); or
- intention not to comply fully and the reasons why.

He stated that the Annual Governance Statement, copies of which had previously been circulated, had been prepared in line with the template which had been provided in the Accounts Directive issued by the Department of the Environment. This set out the following:

- the scope of responsibility of the Council in relation to its Governance;
- the purpose of the Governance Framework;
- the Governance Framework in place;
- the results of the review of effectiveness of the framework; and
- significant governance issues to be disclosed.

Over the previous year there had been considerable effort put into developing and implementing the key elements of a governance framework within the Council to meet the requirements of the Statement of Internal Control. Significant progress had been made in terms of:

- implementing a process whereby Directors, Heads of Service and senior officers signed annual assurance statements. Those statements set out the risk control framework in place and disclosed any significant risks; and
- implementing risk management and related processes, with the production of operational risk registers and action plans for all key services.

However, since the statement covered the period 1st April, 2007 till 31st March, 2008 and the actual implementation of those key measures had not taken place until after the year end, the governance statement would have to include a disclosure that it would be the Council's Intention to comply fully by 1st April, 2009 (or earlier) with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants' Code of Governance Framework.

The Committee approved the Annual Governance Statement.

**Internal Audit Annual
Assurance Statement 2007/08**

The Committee was advised that each year the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services presented an Annual Assurance Statement. The Statement formed part of the Corporate Governance arrangements for the Council and, since the Council was responsible for the stewardship of public money, it was necessary to demonstrate that it had adequate and effective systems of risk management, governance and control. The Annual Assurance Statement was a professional opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment taking account of:

- the key elements of the Council's internal control arrangements, including risk management and governance arrangements;
- the results of audit work undertaken in 2007/08 and the management responses/actions taken in respect of audit reports; and
- future developments which might lead to improvements in internal control.

Information to support the assurance statement had previously been circulated and included a summary of the audit work which had been undertaken, issues arising and the actions which had been taken by management to address the audit recommendations.

The Committee approved the internal audit assurance statement for the period ended 31st March, 2008.

**Annual Review of the Effectiveness
of Internal Audit 2007/08**

The Committee deferred consideration of a report on the Annual Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit 2007/08 to enable it to be considered in the first instance by the Audit Panel.

**Budget Monitoring for the
Year Ended 31st March, 2007;
Financial Reporting 2008/09;
and Budget Cycle 2009/10**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

Revenue Budget 2007/08

At the monthly Meeting of Belfast City Council (BCC) held on the 1st February 2007 Council approved the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 19th January 2007 and determined an increase in the Revenue Estimates of the Council for the forthcoming financial year of 2.83% resulting in a Non-Domestic Rate of 21.16 pence and a Domestic Rate of 0.2423 pence in the pound. This amounted to departmental net expenditure of £107,879,710 exclusive of capital charges.

Capital Programme 2007/08

The draft Capital Programme for 2007/08 and future years outlines a programme of expenditure of £27,704,280 to be financed through loans and a further £3,371,200 to be financed through revenue contributions. This programme of expenditure was presented to the Council Improvement Board on 12 December 2006.

The purposes of this report are as follows:

- To inform Members of the corporate year end actual position as compared to budget for 2007/08.
- To highlight for Members the key issues arising from this budget monitoring and to make recommendations for improvement.
- To propose a financial reporting framework for 2008/09.
- To discuss the financial planning process for 2009/10.

BCC Summary Revenue Outturn 2007/08

Expenditure

The Council's net budget for the year was £107,879,710. Outturn for the year was £107,229,800 giving a net under-spend for the year of £649,910. This underspend is 0.60% of the budget set for 2007/08, representing a significant achievement. This successful outcome is the result of much hard work done by Financial Services, Departmental Business Support Managers and senior officers.

Income

Finalisation of rate income has shown a recent trend of significant variation. The finalisation in 2005/06 was £3.9m compared to a claw back of £630,000 in 2006/07. The fluctuation in the finalisation is due to Central Government miscalculating the estimated product of a penny (EPP) which was principally brought about by policy changes in respect of industrial de-rating and vacant properties. Consequently, in the 2007/08 final accounts no allowance has been made for additional income being received through the finalisation of rates process.

When setting the rate for the year BCC was advised by DOE (Local Government Division) that the General Exchequer Grant would be £4,495,640. The actual grant received was £4,040,970 – £454,670 less than budget. The loss of grant was attributed to the impact of rating policy.

After considering departmental outturn, the reduction in the General Exchequer Grant and the impact of finalisation on rate income the Council has a net under-spend on the year's activity of £195,240 – Table 1.

Table 1 - BCC Income and Expenditure 2007/08

	<u>Budget (£)</u>	<u>Actual (£)</u>	<u>Variance (£)</u>
Net Dept. Expenditure	107,879,710	107,229,800	649,910
Gen Exchequer Grant	-4,495,640	-4,040,970	-454,670
Contribution from Reserves	-1,000,000	-1,000,000	0
Rate Income	<u>-102,384,070</u>	<u>-102,384,070</u>	<u>0</u>
	Nil	-195,240	195,240
Plus Finalisation accrual 2007/08			<u>0</u>
			<u>195,240</u>
Surplus for the year			

BCC Summary Capital Outturn 2007/08

Expenditure on capital projects was £22,900,650 for the year. This high level of expenditure was driven by Grove Wellbeing Centre and the Waste Transfer Station which incurred costs of £8,398,400 and £2,716,700 respectively. The capital programme was financed by loans (Grove Wellbeing Centre £11.2m) grants (£8.2m) and revenue contributions (£4.1m).

At the 31st March 2008 the capital account is under-financed by £140,625. There are no issues with schemes running over budget.

Members at the special Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 13 June will be presented with details of a new process to manage the development of future capital programmes.

Key Issues

An analysis of the outturn for 2007/08 has highlighted a number of corporate issues which need addressed. These are discussed below.

Major Projects

As a result of the new corporate planning process, the Council is moving more and more to delivering its priorities through a combination of functional service delivery and corporate and thematic project work. The Annual Governance Statement 2007/08 has identified the need to ensure effective financial management, at a corporate level, of large projects. Under the Scheme of Delegation, in year management and virement of budgets rests with

Directors in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services. As we move to more thematic working and new reporting arrangements, revised governance arrangements will be required which will enable more input from Members, Committees and Council. It is therefore recommended that an independent report is commissioned with the purpose of developing revised governance arrangements to address these issues which will be presented to Committee in September.

Direct Employee Costs

Direct employees costs consist of salaries, wages, overtime, agency staff, and national insurance and superannuation contributions. These payroll costs continue to be our largest area of spending amounting to 68% of net expenditure in 2007/08. It is therefore essential that these budgets are tightly managed. A factor in managing these costs is control over staff numbers which rose last year. It is therefore recommended a report is brought to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September with recommendations as to how the Committee can better exercise oversight on establishment numbers.

The Director of Corporate Services has also completed a value for money review of overtime and associated costs. The review examined the key drivers of overtime, the relationship between overtime and other costs such as agency workers and the organisational barriers to reducing overtime without adversely impacting on service deliver. An improvement plan will be shortly presented to the Audit Panel based on the recommendations of this review.

Inflationary Pressures

Members will be aware of rising costs in all areas of the economy. For example, the latest inflation figures show food prices rising at 6.6% and oil and other fuels at 59.4%. This has had a negative impact on the financial performance of all Council departments during 2007/08. Parks and Leisure has been particularly hard hit. These inflationary pressures are continuing to impact on the Council and it is imperative that this situation is managed as best we can in order to avoid significant budget overspends in 2008/09. The Director of Corporate Services is currently carrying out an in-depth review of the impact of inflation on Council expenditure for 2008/09 and 2009/10. This information will be brought to Committee at the earliest possible opportunity with particular reference to fuel and utility costs. It will also be used to inform Members as part of the budget setting process for 2009/10.

Financial Reporting 2008/09

The Council is in a transitional phase as we move to implementation of the new corporate plan. Budgets and methods of reporting will need to be revised. This report represents a first step in this process. In 2008/09 this reporting will be further enhanced by the following:

- Half year, three quarter year and full year outturn and forecast reports to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at Council level.
- Half year, three quarter year and full year outturn and forecast reports to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at committee level detail.
- Half year, three quarter year and full year outturn and forecast reports to each departmental committee.

As part of this framework Members will be required to actively manage the allocation of resources within the year as priorities and actions change. To facilitate this evolving role of Members, training specifically for Members in financial management will be offered.

It is also recommended that the effectiveness of the current financial policies and procedures to support this revised reporting framework is reviewed as a matter of urgency.

Members should note that budget monitoring will continue on a monthly basis by Financial Services, business managers and senior officers.

Budget development for 2009/10

The Council will agree a new corporate plan for the next three years which will have significant consequences for the organisation. At the same time the Council is preparing for the implementation of RPA. The new corporate plan will require the Council to deliver its priorities in a more complex way. As stated earlier in this report, if the Council is going to deliver on the priorities set by Members then it will have to deliver on the basis of functions, themes and areas. In terms of the budgets for next year, this means that we need to develop a revised budgeting process which is more integrated with the business planning and performance management of the organisation.

Appendix One provides details of the key elements of a revised planning cycle which was agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23 May 2008.

The planning cycle requires Members to receive the following information in June:

1. An assessment of the financial performance and standing of the Council for 2007/08.
2. An assessment of key financial external pressures such as inflation.
3. Notification of the district rates finalisation figure for 2007/08.
4. Draft efficiency programme

The first two information requirements have already been provided in this report. The district rates finalisation figure has not been received from Land and Property Services. The Director of Corporate Services has informed LPS of the need for Members to receive this information on a timely basis. If the information is received before 20 June, then it will be tabled at the committee meeting.

Work has already commenced on the draft efficiency programme for 2009/10. Key areas of work include the use of new technology to procure goods and services, a review of vacant properties in Belfast the results of which will be reported to committee today under the rates item on the agenda. The Council has also recently tendered for a review of efficiency and treasury management in the organisation and the successful company – Sector – will commence work at the end of June. A full report on the efficiency programme will be presented to committee in September.

The revised planning cycle also requires Members to provide a range of indicative acceptable rate levels for 2009/10. This information will be needed so that a comparison can be made of draft budgets and plans against the affordability intentions of Members. The Director of Corporate Services will discuss this issue with Members at the committee meeting on 20th June.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations in this report, it is further recommended that an independent review of Financial Services takes place as a matter of urgency. This review would include the current financial policies and procedures and the relationship between financial management in the centre of the organisation and the other departments.

Recommendations

Members are requested to agree to the following:

1. Note the results of the financial outturn for 2007/08.
2. Commission an independent report to examine the financial governance implications of combining functional and thematic working.

3. Consider a report in September on how establishment numbers can be better controlled.
4. Consider a report in September on the impact of inflationary pressures on the 2008/09 budgets.
5. Note the revised financial reporting arrangements for 2008/09.
6. Consider a report in September on the efficiency programme for 2009/10.
7. Commission an independent review of Financial Services as a matter of urgency. The review should include the current financial policies and procedures and the relationship between financial management in the centre of the organisation and the other departments.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Annual Accounts 2007/08

The Committee was advised that the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 required the Council's Statement of Accounts to be approved as soon as reasonably practical and in any event before 30th June immediately following the end of the financial year.

The Director of Corporate Services submitted for the Committee's consideration the Council's Statement of Accounts and Financial Report for the year ended 31st March, 2008. The report explained the Council's finances during the previous financial year and its financial position at the end of that year. The Director confirmed that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2008 had been prepared in the form directed by the Department of the Environment and in his opinion presented fairly the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

He explained that, during the year, the Council had reported a reduction on the District Fund Balance of £4,767,465. This had reduced the credit balance on the District Fund Reserves to £10,367,397, which was approximately 6.8% of annual gross expenditure, or 8.9% of net operating expenditure.

The reduction had been made up as follows:

	£
Contribution from Reserves	1,000,000
Transfer to the City Investment Fund	2,075,000
Reduction in specified reserves	1,887,705
Loss of General Grant	454,670
Departmental Surplus	<u>(649,910)</u>
	4,767,465

The Council aimed currently to maintain the level of District Fund Reserves in the region of 5 to 10% of annual gross expenditure. Currently the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountants did not define a minimum or maximum level of reserves but rather felt it appropriate for Local Authorities, on the advice of their

Finance Directors, to make their own judgement on such matters taking into account all the relevant local circumstances.

The Director reported that the Council's reserves were made up currently of the following:

District Fund - £10,367,397

The District Fund Reserves could be used to supplement income and any unexpected expenditure in future years. £765,207 related to expenditure committed at the year-end.

City Investment Fund - £2,075,000

The City Investment Fund had been created to give a clear demonstration of the Council's propensity to action and its wish to contribute to the vibrancy, prosperity, culture and attractiveness of the City. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 14th December, had agreed the cash flow requirements necessary to establish the fund and had indicated that in the 2007/08 financial year £1 million was to be allocated from reserves, with £1.075 million to come from rental income received following the result of a land tribunal case.

Capital Receipts Reserve - £1,061,447

These were capital receipts which had originated primarily from the sale of assets and which had not yet been used to finance capital expenditure.

Repairs and Renewals Fund - £13,611,670

This fund had been established under Section 56 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and had an approved limit of £22 million and was to fund the closure of the landfill site.

Other Fund Balances and Reserves - £489,970

This related to the Election Reserve which had been set up to smooth the cost of running Council elections.

After discussion, it was

Resolved – That the Committee approves the Council's Financial Accounts and Report for the year ended 31st March, 2008.

**Rates Issues and Service Level Agreement
with Land and Property Services**

The Committee agreed to defer until its meeting scheduled to be held on 22nd August reports on rates issues and a Service Level Agreement with Land and Property Services.

**Response to Review of Domestic Rating –
Reduction of Maximum Capital Value**

The Committee was reminded that, in April, 2007, the new domestic rating system had been introduced. The new system had established a maximum capital value known as the cap, which had been set at £500,000, meaning that any property with a capital value of more than £500,000 was treated for rating purposes as if the value were £500,000. In Belfast, approximately 1,100 properties had been valued at over £500,000. In 2007/08 the loss in the district rate revenue as a result of the cap had been estimated to be £496,291.

The Director of Corporate Services reported that the Minister for the Department of Finance and Personnel was now seeking views on a proposal to reduce the maximum cap from £500,000 to £400,000. He pointed out that the consultation paper had estimated that a £400,000 cap would lead to a district revenue loss of £428,000 on top of the £496,291 which had been lost as a result of the £500,000 cap. Accordingly, he submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted response to the consultation:

"Belfast City Council Response

This response follows the consultation paper and responds to each of the questions raised in the order in which they appear in the consultation document.

Financial Impact (Section 2)

At the present level of the cap, as the consultation paper indicates, only a relatively small number of taxpayers benefit involving a revenue loss of some £2.5m across Northern Ireland. Increasing the cap nearly doubles the amount of income foregone to some £4.7m.

In relation to the financial impact we would simply make the point that unless the Government compensates local authorities for this loss in revenue the cost of the cap will be met by other ratepayers or by a reduction in services or by a combination of both.

One point that does not appear to be mentioned in the consultation paper is the potential loss of benefit subsidy in relation to those ratepayers above the cap who are in receipt of housing benefit (rate rebate). Whereas this cost was being met by central government it will, under this proposal, have to be met by other ratepayers.

The introduction of the capital value system of rating was intended to address the basic unfairness that had arisen over the years in relation to the incidence of the former rental value system. Having a cap reverses this intention and effectively offsets some of the rates burden from higher value properties to lower value properties.

Impact on District Councils

If the figures quoted in the consultation paper are correct the impact on Belfast City Council ratepayers is significant and means that the district rate revenue loss associated with a £500,000 capital value cap in 2007/08 was £496,300.

The consultation paper estimates that reducing the cap to £400,000 would lead to a further £428,200 reduction (using the same poundage). So the total loss in district rate revenue for Belfast of a £400,000 cap this year would have been £924,500

Without compensation this is a serious loss of income for the City Council to absorb in relation to its commitment to provide a high standard of service delivery and to meet its citizens demands for higher quality of services. The impact will be to either increase the district rate or a reduction in the level of services provided or a combination of both. This is not acceptable to the City Council particularly as it will be accountable to ratepayers for a tax increase that is beyond its control.

It is difficult to see how the suggestion that the growth in the valuation list will 'over time protect councils from the adverse effects of the reduction in the cap'. The increase in the tax base does not grow at the rate that this income is lost as a result of the cap and would have occurred whether or not the cap was in place.

Providing subsidy on a transitional basis, whilst better than nothing, does not address the issue of a loss of income or a higher burden on other ratepayers in the medium term but only delays it on an incremental basis for a period of time. The City Council is, therefore, strongly of the opinion that the Government should reimburse the Council, in full, for the loss of revenue.

Summary of Impact Assessments (Section 3)

The conclusions reached in section 3 of the report offer no surprises in that ratepayers in the least deprived wards will benefit most, as they have the highest number of properties valued above £400,000 and comparing the rate bills under both levels of caps, it is obvious that the least deprived decile will benefit from the biggest reduction in their bill (£15) if a £400 000 cap were introduced

In relation to socio-economic groups again, not surprisingly, the results of the analysis suggest that those in the 'Managerial/Professional' category are significantly over-represented among those benefiting from the cap, representing nearly 70%, compared to 23% of the overall NI population.

The results of the impact assessments would appear to suggest that the 'asset rich, income poor' are not necessarily a high proportion of those ratepayers occupying the high value properties that will be eligible for relief since 70% of the socio-economic group are in the 'Managerial/Professional' category.

If the 'asset rich, income poor' are a feature of the class of properties affected by the cap it should be borne in mind that there is the rate relief scheme that could provide them with greater assistance, based on their resources, than is available, individually, under the capping scheme.

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

The City Council has no comment to make on the results of the equality impact analysis

Conclusions

A property tax that is based on capital values assists in ensuring a degree of vertical and horizontal equity in that similar properties in different locations are taxed similarly and different properties are taxed in a way that reflects their differences. It also approximates to the taxpayer's ability to pay, although it is clearly not a perfect measure. The introduction of a cap diminishes the vertical and horizontal equity of the rating system and is further eroded by increasing the level of the cap.

In its response to the Rating Review the City Council stated that it did not support the retention of the cap in the longer term but did support it in the short term as a mechanism to recognise that a switch from a rental value based system to a capital value based system can have a negative financial impact on those living in high value properties some of whom are considered to be 'asset rich, income poor.' It considers that the cap should be phased out and not reduced.

The impact assessment indicates that the cap provides relief to those who, generally, are in the high income socio-economic group and not in the 'asset rich, income poor' category. That said there will be, undoubtedly, some ratepayers who fall in to this category but who could be better targeted directly through the rate relief scheme. Using a cap is little more than a crude and indiscriminate use of scarce resources.

No assessment appears to have been taken of the loss of housing benefit subsidy as a result of this proposal and the cost to the Northern Ireland ratepayers.

Neither does any account appear to have been taken of the impact on revaluation. The principle being the lower the cap together taken together with property inflation will make revaluation a farce and will damage the buoyancy of the property tax.

The City Council does not support a reduction in the cap and believes that if the Government is to go ahead with the reduction then it should compensate the City Council for the revenue foregone so that the burden does not fall directly on other ratepayers or on a reduced level of service provision.

The City Council urges the Government to give further consideration to the above points before coming to a final decision.”

The Committee approved the proposed response to the consultation document, subject to the inclusion of the following comment – the Council does not support a reduction in the cap but prefers to see its phased removal.

**Council Response to Consultation
on Review of Domestic Rating –
the Rating of Empty Homes**

The Committee was advised that vacant domestic properties were currently excluded from paying rates. However, the Minister for Finance and Personnel was now seeking views on a proposal from the Executive to introduce from April, 2010 the rating of empty homes. Views were being sought also on specific policy issues including exclusions, the possibility of phasing, whether an initial exemption period should be provided for and the interaction with other rating reliefs and allowances.

The Land and Property Services Agency had established that approximately 13,500 properties had been listed as vacant throughout the City. The introduction of the rating of empty homes would therefore raise additional revenue. The Department of Finance and Personnel in its consultation paper had posed a number of questions and the following is a summary of the Council's proposed response:

- **Rates currently are the City Council's principal source of income accounting for some 74% of total expenditure and it is essential with ever increasing demands for improved services that the tax base is maintained and enhanced.**
- **The increased taxation would encourage owners to find ways of making better use of the empty properties by, selling, re-letting or redeveloping the empty properties.**
- **Empty properties enjoy the infrastructure services provided by the City Council whilst the owners do not currently contribute to the costs incurred by the local authority.**

- The Council supports the proposal that empty homes should be rated at 100% and does not support a tiered charge with the rate increasing after a period of time. This level of liability will simplify administration and will be readily understood by taxpayers.
- Should the Executive decide to introduce vacant rating in a phased way, the Council believes that the only reasonable phasing would be by a stepped liability starting with 50% in year one, 75% in year two and 100% in year three. It is essential, if this were to happen, that the full charge is not deferred for longer than three years because a charge lower than 100% would encourage owners to not report the occupancy of properties.
- There should be an exemption for low value properties such as garages and caravans. The Council does not believe a minimum capital value should be applied to derelict properties or those in disrepair as this would not encourage re-use or redevelopment of these properties. These properties can be dealt with by a time-limited exemption.
- It would not be unreasonable to have an initial exemption period for empty homes of six months. The six month exemption period for new properties would commence upon issue of the completion notice.
- Where appropriate, consideration should be given to some exemptions, particularly where the reason the property is vacant is beyond the control of the owner. Social housing would also be excluded from the provisions of an empty property rate.
- Reliefs, such as transitional relief and the maximum capital value reliefs, should continue to apply in relation to the rating of empty homes because they are related to the property not the ratepayer.
- The Council supports the introduction of the rating of empty homes because it will raise additional revenue, which can be used to either reduce the current district rate or used to improve services or a combination of both. The main point is that it provides political choice.
- The number of vacant properties is likely to be half that used for the estimate in the consultation paper following a survey carried out by the Council Building Control Service on behalf of LPS found 51% of the surveyed properties listed as vacant were found to be occupied. This will impact of the level of income generated.

- **The Council agrees with all aspects of the preferred approach detailed in the consultation paper except on the general initial exemption period. The Council would rather there was a general period on six months rather than a 12 month exemption for new properties only.**

The Committee approved the Council's proposed response.

Audit Report on the Analysis of Staff Travel

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Audit Report on the Analysis of Staff Travel to enable it to be considered in conjunction with the report on the new travel policy which was due to be submitted to its meeting scheduled to be held on 22nd August.

Community Festivals Fund

The Committee was reminded that the Development Committee, at its meeting on 14th May, had agreed to:

- (i) accept a Letter of Offer from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for funding of £77,300 for the Community Festivals Fund;
- (ii) make available in the current financial year £120,000 for the Fund, subject to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreeing to provide the finance required; and
- (iii) request that the Department increase the amount which it was providing to the Fund by £42,700 to match the Council's proposed contribution.

That decision had been ratified by the Council at its meeting on 2nd June.

The Members were informed that the Development Committee had been advised that the Development Departmental Budget would not be able to provide the finance to match the funding offered by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, since no provision had been made in the Revenue Estimates. Therefore, in accordance with Financial Regulation E.14 that any proposal to incur expenditure which was not included within the estimates and which could not be covered by virement should be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Development Committee had requested that the necessary finance be provided by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Committee agreed to increase from reserves the cash limits of the Development Committee by £120,000 in order to finance the Community Festivals Fund.

Human Resources

Structural Review of Good Relations Unit to Facilitate Peace III Funding

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Approval was given in April 2007 for a review of the resources within the Good Relations Unit to address increased workload, both current and projected. The business case for this identified that the role and responsibilities of the Unit had changed from those related to the development and promotion of the Council’s Good Relations strategy and equality agenda, to become as much one of a deliverer of key projects across the city including the inter-agency bonfire management and the Re-imaging Communities projects. At the same time the major Conflict Resolution Project (funded through the Peace II EU programme) commenced. Coupled with the increasing activity in the Good Relations grant-aid scheme, these responsibilities involved actions designed to effect real improvements within local communities through high-profile partnerships which also demonstrated the increasing validation of the Council’s leadership role within the City.

In addition the business case identified a corporate desire to consolidate within the Unit the developing responsibilities for the Council in the context of increasing equality legislation, especially in the areas of race; disability and diversity generally. This legislative programme reflects the government policy document ‘A Shared Future’ which called on public bodies ‘to set the pace on movement towards a shared society and ... to lead by example.’ The Unit also had been given responsibility to develop the Peace III Plan for Belfast in relation to two of the main themes.

It was quickly identified that the impact on the Unit of a successful bid under the Peace III proposals would be considerable but not yet fully quantifiable until the bid was developed and SEUPB made its decisions. It was agreed that work on the full review would be paused, particularly as some of the current pressure had been alleviated by the availability of additional funding from CRU (OFMDFM) for an additional Good Relations Officer. As the grant-aid was not secured beyond a twelve month period and the structure of the Unit was under review, the additional resource was engaged for a fixed-term period of twelve months due to end in August 2008.

Key issues

A number of recent developments now justify the completion of that review and the recommendations in this report;

1. The Peace Plan for Belfast has been approved by SEUPB with the offer of £6.3m funding for the period till September 2011. This requires the Council to put in place the mechanisms and resources, met by 100% grant-aid from the overall allocation, to manage this funding stream in to the City;
2. CRU has indicated that core funding of the fourth Good Relations Officer will continue. This enables the Council to address the contractual term of this post
3. The Council has projects within the Plan for which it is the actual implementing agent and not simply the funding stream manager. If these are to be delivered for the benefit of the City within the timeframe of available funding, the resources paid for by the funding must start to be put in place.

This review then, will address all of the areas outlined above. It will look at the resources required in terms of 'technical' staff, clerical support to cover the needs of the enhanced 'field work' staff, and the resourcing requirements necessary to meet the Peace III Programme.

Meetings were held with the Business Support Manager and the Good Relations Manager to determine anticipated future requirements for the efficient and effective delivery of the programme. In conducting our research, BIS have consulted with experts in this field. This included meeting with the Operations Manager, Belfast Local Strategy Partnership (BLSP) and benchmarking with other similar organisations and bodies. This information was verified and analysed to determine anticipated needs and methods of meeting these needs.

Core Good Relations Unit

The remit of the Good Relations Unit has grown recently, with new responsibility for additional funded projects, as outlined above.

A new post of Good Relations Officer was created for a fixed term period in 2007. Since this post was created the Unit has been able to develop a wide range of projects and generate extra work. Following the assurance from CRU that core funding for a fourth Good Relations Officer will continue, BIS recommend that, considering the additional workload and the demands of the Unit, this post is made permanent, increasing the number of established Good Relations Officer posts to four. This post should only be recruited once funding has been secured from CRU.

At present there is one established post of Clerk/WPO, providing clerical assistance to the Unit. BIS carried out a staffing review in 2006 where roles and responsibilities were reviewed and realigned. From this time, the Unit have required additional clerical support due to the increase in the volume of work and the increase in the number of projects the being managed.

Since this time, the Unit has been supported by a temporary member of staff, employed through an agency. Due to the increase in the current projects the GRU are involved in and the associated clerical work that will be involved, BIS recommend that this post should be made permanent.

BIS would suggest that due to the volatile nature and changing role of the Good Relations Unit, we revisit the section after one year in line with good practice. This will ensure that the recommendations detailed in this report become embedded enabling the Good Relations Manager to deliver the Good Relations strategy and operational requirements in line with the Corporate Plan.

Peace III

Belfast City Council will be the lead partner in this Peace Plan, which covers the administrative area of the Council. The plan was drawn up in accordance with detailed SEUPB guidelines and the actions included are complementary and add value to the city's programme of work in the field of Good Relations.

Belfast City Council has recently been awarded £6.3 million to fund the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan. With this award there are a number of conditions of funding to which the Council must adhere. One of these conditions is that the management support costs for the period September 2008 to December 2010 should not exceed 7-10% of the funding award. In considering the staffing required to deliver this programme, BIS has therefore remained mindful of this stipulation.

Migrant Worker Project

The SEUPB has also approved funding at 100% for the creation of two further posts to ensure delivery of the Migrant Worker Project under point 1.1 of the Peace III Programme, Building Positive Relations at the Local Level. This funding is provided for within the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan.

Resource Implications

Staffing Requirements

A revised organisation structure, detailed job descriptions and competencies required have been drawn up in line with standard Council terms and conditions. These have been benchmarked with the Operations Manager BLSP, who also acknowledged the appropriateness of the salary scales awarded to each post.

Core Good Relations Unit

BIS recommend;

- The current fixed term post of Good Relations Officer is made permanent, and should be paid salary scale PO 4;
- The temporary post of Clerk/WPO currently filled through a recruitment agency should become part of the establishment, increasing the number of Clerk/WPO's to two, within the Unit, and should be paid salary scale 2/3.

Peace III

BIS further recommend that the following posts are created to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of the Peace III programme;-

- Three Good Relations Staff – one Programme Manger (salary scale PO5) one Senior Project Development Officer (salary scale PO2), and one Project Development Officer (salary scale SO2) to assist groups in developing appropriate projects; to organise calls for applications; appraise projects; assess applications and make recommendations for funding to the Good Relations Partnership.
- One Programme Support Assistant (salary scale 6) to provide administrative support to the Peace III project.
- Three Financial Staff – One Finance Officer (salary scale SO2) and two Monitoring Officers (scale 6) to deal with all claims, to ensure that all projects are properly monitored and that expenditure is compliant not only with standard Council and local government audit procedures but also with the stringent EU financial requirements, to ensure probity and public accountability.

Migrant Worker Project

- Two Migrant Project Staff – One Project Officer (Migrant Workers) (salary scale PO4) and One Clerk/WPO (salary scale 2/3) to ensure management and delivery of the Migrant Worker Project and keeping under review new developments in the field of inward migration.

Financial Implications

Core Good Relations Unit

Good Relations Officer

The cost of the fixed term Good Relations Officer (PO 4) equates to £35,852. This post is 75% funded by the CRU.

The cost of a permanent post of Good Relations Officer (PO 4) is £35,852.

Therefore there is an ongoing cost of £8,963 per annum associated with this new permanent post, due to the fact that Council provide 25% of the cost of this post.

Clerk/WPO

The cost of the temporary Clerk/WPO (scale 2/3) equates to £16,536.

The generic post of Clerk/WPO has been evaluated at Salary Scale 2/3. This equates to a cost of £16,536.

Therefore there is an ongoing cost associated with this new permanent post of £16,536 per annum.

BIS have been assured by the Department that the cost of the above recommendations will be met within existing budgets.

Peace III

The projected salary costs for management of the Peace III programme, including National Insurance, Superannuation and anticipated pay awards for the period September 2008-December 2010 equate to £442,049.

Additional running costs for the programme equal £179,560 For the period outlined above.

Total management Costs for the Peace III equates to £628,609

This figure is 9.9% of the overall award and is therefore within the threshold of 7-10% for management support costs as stipulated by SEUPB as a condition of funding.

Migrant Worker Project (affiliated to Peace III programme)

Project Officer (Migrant Worker)

The post has been evaluated at PO4, which equates to £35,852.

Clerk/WPO

This post has been evaluated at Salary Scale 2/3. This equates to a cost of £16, 536.

ALL OF THESE POSTS UNDER THE HEADING OF PEACE III ARE 100% FUNDED BY THE SEUPB.

The SEUPB expect Councils to absorb a proportion of the costs associated with the Peace III programme. Belfast City Council will make a contribution in kind through the corporate strategic management of the Peace III plan and its alignment to the Corporate Plan. In addition it will absorb the cost of any necessary furniture and equipment, as it will be more beneficial that these are retained as Council assets at the end of the programme.

Recommendations

Core Good Relations Unit

- That the fixed term post of Good Relations Officer is made permanent, salary scale PO 4. The cost to the council will be £8,963 per annum.
- The temporary post of Clerk/WPO is made permanent, salary scale 2/3. This post will be funded through the existing budget.

Peace III (These posts are fixed term until Dec. 2010)

- That a post of Programme Manager is created, salary scale PO5
- That a post of Senior Project Development Officer are created, salary scale PO2
- That a post of Project Development Officer is created, salary scale SO2
- That a post of Programme Support Assistant is created, salary scale 6
- That a post of Finance Officer is created, salary scale SO2
- That two posts of Monitoring Officer are created, salary scale 6

There are no costs to the Council as these posts are 100% funded by the SEUPB.

Migrant Worker Project (These posts are fixed term until Dec. 2010)

- That a post Project Officer (Migrant Worker) is created, salary scale PO4
- That a post of Clerk/WPO is created, salary scale 2/3.

There are no costs to the Council as these posts are 100% funded by the SEUPB.

In developing the recommendations detailed in this report, BIS have addressed the need to ensure the effective delivery of the Good Relations Strategy, in line with the Councils corporate objectives.

Key to Abbreviations

SEUPB - Special European Union Programmes Body
CRU - Community Relations Unit
OFMDFM - Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
GRU - Good Relations Unit
BLSP - Belfast Local Strategy Partnership”

After discussion, during which the Committee expressed concern at the imposition of a ceiling of 10% on management support costs, which could cause difficulties for the Council in achieving a programme of quality and effectiveness, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Legal Services Department – Review of Departmental Resources

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th May, 2007, it had granted approval for the undertaking of a review of the resources required by the Legal Services Department. Eversheds LLP, a leading legal practice with particular expertise in local government across the United Kingdom, had been commissioned to prepare a report. The Director of Legal Services advised the Members that the key message outlined in the report stated that “the lawyers provide excellent quality legal services to Directors, the Corporate Management Team and across the Council”. However, the report had highlighted also the need for the Department to:

- restructure the Department’s Business Support in order to provide more effective and focused administrative support to the professional side;
- assist the professional side in more effectively dealing with their managerial responsibilities;

- develop a Succession Plan for all staff, especially the Director and Principal Solicitors;
- further develop the Department's service standards and performance indicators, benchmarked against best practice Authorities, in the context of performance management;
- introduce better systems for engaging with client requirements and expectations; and
- develop a more "one team" approach across all sections of the Department.

It was the aim of the Department, with assistance from the Business Improvement Section, to develop during the ensuing year an Implementation Plan to deliver on the recommendations. The Director stated that the Eversheds' report had emphasised the need to build capacity within the current professional staff, provide more management information at both an operational level and to client Departments and to be more proactive in demonstrating value-for-money to those Departments. In order to develop a one team approach, it was proposed that a properly structured exercise, which would be centred on team development, be organised with all members of the legal team participating in the programme.

The Committee granted approval for the Business Improvement Section to assist in the development of an Implementation Plan which would address the recommendations contained within the Eversheds' report and for a staff development day to be organised as part of that process.

Standing Order 55 - Employment of Relatives

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Order 55 and the authority delegated to him, the Director of Corporate Services had authorised the appointment of a number of persons who were related to existing officers of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointments.

Asset Management

City Hall Mayor Works

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the major works which were being undertaken in the City Hall:

"Relevant Background Information

A previous update on the City Hall contract was presented to Committee on 22nd February 2008 and as agreed this is the third quarterly update.

1. Project Information:

Project Start Date: 19th November 2007

Contract Period: Phase 1 Completion Date – 52 weeks
(19th November 2008)

Phase 2 Completion Date – 90 weeks
(10th August 2009)

Project Budget: £11.9 million

Main Contractor: Graham Construction

Progress to Date:

- Asbestos removal/ encapsulation work is now complete
- Re-roofing work is 60% complete and currently running ahead of programme
- Electrical strip out is progressing and the first fix is in progress
- Strip out of radiators, sprinkler system, heating pipework and boilers is complete and the first fix is ahead of programme
- Plaster repairs have commenced and are on programme
- Redecoration of the Council Chamber and Rotunda area has commenced
- Refurbishment of chandeliers is in progress and chandeliers will be returned by the end of June.

The project is currently on programme and a simplified version of the construction programme is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

Variations:

Members will be aware that the biggest risk to the budget and programme of any project is that of 'changing your mind' – hence it is vital that Committee exercises very strict control over any proposed variations to the specification over and above those that occur through unforeseen circumstances.

Variations approved to date include:

- Removal of all racking in the basement - £16,500 (funded by Facilities Management)
- Relocation of the Emergency Room from the basement to the second floor - £350,000 (funded by Health and Environmental Services Department)

There are no further budget or programme impacts from these variations.

Additional Work Requests:

Facilities Management have requested the following variations which can proceed if funds are made available:

- Replacement of the lightning protection system which does not comply with current standards
- Decoration of all internal window frames
- Repairs to stained glass windows at high level in the Rotunda
- Replacement of pigeon netting/wiring
- Upgrade of the sound system in the three function rooms
- Re-covering bench seats in council chamber
- Refurbishment of gas lights

There is a logic to doing this maintenance work now while the refurbishment is underway. While some of these items had been identified they were not included in the tender specification for budgetary reasons.

The former Lord Mayor Councillor Rodgers on a recent site visit raised a number of issues regarding the contract which the Committee also needs to address. Items raised include the sound system for the Great Hall which is included above.

A more fundamental issue was that of air conditioning. The use of air conditioning in City hall was discounted for a number of reasons:

- (i) Cost – we have asked consultants to provide installation, running, maintenance and replacement costs which have yet not been received although this could easily reach over £2m. There are no current funds available for this work and such expenditure would have a major impact on other project funding.

- (ii) A major problem is the building itself both in terms of heritage, aesthetics, disruption and the practicality of getting permission for suspended ceilings hiding pipework etc.
- (iii) From a green/environmental perspective air conditioning is an inefficient user of energy and as the City Hall is single glazed this adds considerably to the expense of heating and cooling costs. The new Energy Property Certificate legislation would mean the City Hall would receive a very poor rating should air conditioning be fitted.

A third issue raised by Councillor Rodgers was a smaller item in regard to telephone booths in the Members Common Room which have been removed as the stud partition contained asbestos and also to increase space in the Common Room. Councillor Rodgers would like these reinstated and the Committee view on this sought.

Councillor interest in the project is most welcome and we are happy to provide further site visits. However, to ensure this project comes in on time and budget any suggestions for major changes must come through Committee. Again Committee views are sought on the additional works suggested.

Financial Matters:

The project is currently within budget.

The estimated cost of the variations proposed by Facilities Management is £337,000 additional.

Facilities Management in anticipation of undertaking some of this work have allocated a budget for City Hall maintenance this year. Together with savings from elsewhere in Facilities Management this equates to between £75,000 and £100,000. The Director of Corporate Services has suggested the balance could be made from some as yet unallocated capital receipts.

Issues Arising:

Subject to Committee view it will be important that funds are made available as soon as possible after detailed costings have been received for the proposed additional work to keep within programme.

The scale of the work going on is now fairly intensive with upwards of 70 men on site.

There has also been recent media interest in this project which we will need to respond to post Committee.

2. Future Use

With refurbishment work well under way, it is important that decisions in respect of the future use of the City Hall are taken promptly and various options are set out in a separate paper.

Key Issues

- 1. It is important that the extent of variations be agreed as soon as possible and that funds are made available to carry out the work.**
- 2. It is imperative that the future use of the City Hall is determined as a matter of urgency. Works are quickly progressing to the stage where alterations / changes in layout will have a major time and cost effect on the project**

Resource Implications

The anticipated project expenditure is £12,241,500 for the Major Works contract, based on the accepted tender and approved variations but excluding any of the variations not yet approved.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report and determines:

- 1. The extent of the additional variations to be approved as suggested by Facilities Management and Councillor Rodgers**
- 2. Funding for the recommended variations as suggested in the paper**
- 3. That the future use of the City Hall paper is taken into account in any decisions.”**

After discussion, the Committee approved the following variations to the contract:

- (i) the replacement of the lightning protection system;**
- (ii) the decoration of all internal window frames;**
- (iii) repairs to the stained glass windows at high level in the Rotunda;**
- (iv) the replacement of the pigeon netting/wiring;**

- (v) the upgrading of the sound system in the three function rooms;
- (vi) the re-covering of the bench seats in the Council Chamber; and
- (vii) the refurbishment of the gas lights.

The Committee agreed also that the variations be funded by the City Hall maintenance budget and from unallocated capital receipts.

Future Use of the City Hall

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The current Council will be historically the last Council of the current BCC organisation. The current Council has also been courageous in taking a tough decision to undertake a major refurbishment, involving a disruptive decanting exercise and a large expenditure.

In considering the future use of City Hall it is important that this Council continues to clearly focus on the future and to set the tone for the new organisation post 2011. Symbolically the use of the building in terms of political, public and office uses will be important in terms of the overall leadership and vision Council wishes to set.

In its deliberations on refurbishing City Hall Committee took into consideration a number of issues including health and safety; opportunity to resolve major items of work; minimisation of potential future maintenance problems and also the possible opportunities for more public use of the building.

To date there has been no definitive Committee direction as to the future use of City Hall although there has been some discussion at earlier Committee meetings and in the Accommodation Working Group as well as anecdotal feedback from individual members. The basic principles communicated to date will be picked up in the body of the report.

Key Issues

The building work in city hall is now well underway with most of the preparatory work such as asbestos removal, protection of the marble, removal of redundant mechanical and electrical services now complete. To ensure the works are kept to programme and within budget a Committee decision is now required as to future use of City hall and which parts of the council organisation return to City hall.

There are of course all sorts of options and considerations that could be debated ad infinitum. However, before looking at three basic options a number of principles seem to have some consensus on feedback to date.

1. Members including Party group rooms and Lord Mayor's suite will be located in City Hall.
2. Services most directly and regularly associated with Members must also therefore be located in City hall i.e. Chief Executive; communications; committee and member services; legal services.
3. Services related to running the building also need to be located in City Hall i.e. receptionists, security, facilities.
4. Direct facing public services must also go back to City hall i.e. birth, death and marriages, cemeteries. Some members have made the point that other direct customer contact services should also be accommodated in City Hall.
5. Consideration should be given to creating additional space for more public use of the building.
6. The new emergency room on the second floor will be used as a conference room on a day to day basis.
7. Any decisions must work within the parameters of the current contract.

Basic Options

The above principles can be applied to these following basic options to a greater or lesser degree and provide a guide to decision making.

Option 1

Return everyone to the City Hall as per the October 2007 layout i.e. before we moved out.

This option while seemingly straight forward raises a number of problems.

- A number of Party Groups are unhappy with their current party rooms due to the size of the rooms in relation to Group numbers – this option does not allow us to address that problem
- From a future proofing perspective the issue of having 60 members come 2011 and unknown number of Party Groups is not addressed by this option.
- Some of the Council departments and sections that moved from City hall have changed in terms of responsibilities and structures and would not easily be accommodated e.g. Good Relations has additional temporary staff, Financial Services has a Central

Transaction Unit, CIT has additional responsibilities relating to the Corporate plan etc.

- There is no scope to create more space for public use.
- There is similarly no scope to bring other direct public facing services into the building.

Option 2

Create a 'political' space on the first floor by locating all Party Rooms and Committee Services on the first floor south in the office space formerly occupied by Financial Services.

There are a number of pros and cons with this option.

- The location of the Chamber, Lord Mayor's suite and Party Groups all on one floor is potentially very effective in terms of political interaction.
- Members on the other hand could become isolated from interaction with the public and non Committee services staff by all being located on one floor. This position could of course be mitigated by retaining and possibly enlarging the ground floor common room to take in the current PUP room and Members will also be walking to the ground floor for access and committee meetings.
- The option does, however, open up possibilities on the ground floor such as creating a public café/coffee bar where communications were located and bringing in more public facing services.
- The member room layout is based on current circumstances and may not be suitable post 2011.

Option 3

Reorganise the ground floor to address most of the principles outlined.

- The dissatisfaction with certain Party Group rooms can be addressed by moving the Alliance Party to the SDLP room and giving the Alliance room to the DUP. The SDLP have the possibility of a larger room next door through the removal of a temporary partition.
- Move Legal Services and Communications from the ground floor to allow the public café/coffee facility to be created and some additional rooms made available for public use and also for potential future changes to the political make up of the Council.
- Allocate some ground floor rooms for customer facing services – these would need to be agreed.

- Consider an office suite for all Directors to enable COMT to work more as a corporate team and less as Departmental heads.

Resources

As things stand with the City Hall works contract any of the above variations can be accommodated within programme and budget as rooms have yet to be fitted out and decorated. The café proposal will depend on fit out options which will require a further report.

The proposals in option 2 and 3 free up 2,300 M² (23,000 sq ft) in Adelaide Exchange allowing us to address the expiry of some leases in 2009 and the accommodation consequences thereof. It also allows the disposal of Seymour House and possibly the ISB building as part of a long term accommodation solution.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee select option 3.”

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that no customer-facing services should be retained in Adelaide Exchange. In addition, in order to limit the amount of space to be rented in Adelaide Exchange, as many staff as possible should be returned to the City Hall.

After discussion, the Committee approved the arrangements for the Party Groupings as set out in Option 3 on the understanding that agreement was reached between the Party Group leaders and agreed that a further report providing information on the numbers of staff and the customer-facing services which would be returning to the City Hall be submitted to a future meeting. In addition, the Committee agreed that a business case would need to be prepared in relation to any proposals to locate a café/coffee bar facility in the City Hall.

Council Temporary Office Accommodation - Harvester House

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the obtaining of temporary office accommodation in Harvester House:

“Relevant Background Information

Members are aware of the urgent need to find alternative temporary office accommodation in the City centre as a result of imminent redevelopment proposals for Clarendon House that have now been submitted to Planning Service by the building’s new owners. Notice to Determine Council’s occupation in Clarendon House has now been served effective from 23rd November 2008. Members will also be aware of the continued overcrowding, not only experienced in Clarendon House, but also now evidenced within the Cecil Ward Building.

A Notice under the Belfast Improvement Act requiring essential remedial work was served on Clarendon House as a result of falling masonry from the Adelaide Street façade. Short-term solution has been to remove any visually obvious loose/dangerous masonry from the building but this is very much a temporary measure pending its demolition.

Pending completion of the City Hall refurbishment and in addition to displacement of staff and services from Clarendon House Council will have other temporary accommodation requirements arising from the imminent surrender of Callender Street premises and the forthcoming need to renew short term tenures in both Linenhall Exchange (Feb 2009) and Scottish Amicable buildings (Jan 2011)

Members have previously been advised of only two City centre office buildings that meet the specific occupational requirements of Building Control and of suitable size and availability on a short term basis that could accommodate Council's immediate needs - namely Fanum House and Harvester House. Due to the standard of accommodation in Fanum House it was deemed an unsuitable option for the relocation of Council staff. Relevant Council officers have inspected Harvester House and concluded that it would, with an appropriate degree of refurbishment, be suitable for Council's short term accommodation requirements.

At its meeting on 14th March 2008 the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee authorised the Director of Corporate Services to enter into negotiations for additional accommodation in Harvester House.

Negotiations have been progressed with the agents for Harvester House that will address both Council's immediate need for office space and also provide some scope to deal with subsequent events that will impact on Council's ability to provide suitable short term City centre accommodation for continued effective delivery of its services.

Key Issues

- Current occupation of Clarendon House

Section	Area	Staff
Building Control (part ground and 1st floors)	Part ground – 2,100 sq ft	12
	1st – 6,854 sq ft	60
Cleansing (2nd floor)	2nd – 6,900 sq ft	58
Total	15,854 sq ft	130

- Results from a recent satisfaction survey of staff in Building Control have concluded a very negative view of current accommodation which is in stark contrast to the high levels of satisfaction of staff recorded within other facets of their working environment.
- Harvester House presents an opportunity to explore solutions to current overcrowding in Cecil Ward Building and provide the means to manage other short term Leases that are due to terminate within the coming two to three years.
- The currently available office accommodation in Harvester House is spread over 5 floors totalling 20,524 sq ft. In order to match Council's occupational requirements to the configuration of the available space in these premises will necessitate leasing the entirety of accommodation currently on offer.
- Harvester House provides the essential requirement for Building Control to occupy ground floor accommodation (totalling 4,396 sq ft) with "back office" space available on the immediately adjacent 1st and 2nd floors (9,089 sq ft) The contiguous accommodation on the 3rd and 4th floors (7,039 sq ft) would also provide sufficient space to relieve the overcrowding that is currently experienced by Cleansing.
- By taking all available space in Harvester House Council has strengthened its negotiation position and provisionally agreed the following terms:
 - Term of 5 years
 - Rent based on £11.50 per sq foot (£236,026)
 - Initial 12 months of the term rent free
 - Service Charge payable currently £4.30 per sq foot
- Total annual cost (excluding rates) £324,279
- It is necessary to carry out refurbishment of Harvester House to an acceptable standard including data cabling. The refurbishment contract would be procured through Facilities Management and costs offset by the following savings:

• Rent free period	£236,000
• Contribution by Clarendon	£100,000
• Reduced rent	£102,000
• Planned refurbishment of Clarendon	£100,000
• Total	£538,000

In order to effect an early surrender of Council's tenancy in Clarendon House at least by end of August 2008, thereby facilitating early vacant possession for redevelopment, the owner of Clarendon House is willing to pay a premium of £100,000 towards any relocation/refurbishment expenditure incurred by Council.

Resource Implications

Financial

- The occupational cost of Harvester House is offset by the currently incurred occupational costs of Clarendon House and Callender Street premises which total £223,331 (rent & service charge but excluding rates)
- Financial contribution from owner of Clarendon House in recognition of early surrender of Council occupation and initial 18 months rent free in Harvester House will assist in offsetting relocation to these alternative short term premises.

Asset and Other Implications

- Relocate to a single office building of suitable location, size and specification is considered more cost effective rather than further split Council's temporary requirements over multiple premises that individually would require fitting-out and suitable data communications installed to each.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the detail of this report and

- a. to approve the leasing of additional office accommodation in Harvester House that will also address the loss of space currently faced in other temporary City centre office accommodation, subject to a satisfactory Lease approved by the director of Legal Services,
- b. to approve the refurbishment of Harvester House,
- c. to receive a further report on options for Council's anticipated office space requirements in the longer term at a future date."

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that a value-for-money study in relation to temporary Council office accommodation be included within the Audit Panel's Annual Plan of Work for the current year.

Pharmacy at the Grove Wellbeing Centre

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

By way of a series of legal agreements Belfast City Council and the Belfast Social Care Trust have agreed terms to allow the Trust to construct and operate a new Health centre as part of the Grove Well-Being Centre. In return the Trust and Belfast Education and Library Board agreed to transfer to the Council the site of their existing Health Centre and library at Skegoneill Avenue.

As part of the relocation of Health Services from the Skegoneill Health Centre to the new Grove Well-Being Centre the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have planned for the re-location of pharmacy services within their section of the Well-Being Centre. To this end they have proposed arrangements with the existing Pharmacist at Skegoneill (Dundee Pharmacies).

The Trust’s proposal in relation to re-location of the existing pharmacist may come under legal challenge from other pharmacists in the locality and the Trust have therefore acted to mitigate the impact of this on the provision of pharmacy services at the Well-Being Centre.

Their current proposal is to provide the existing pharmacist with what is known as ‘a temporary re-location’ under pharmacy practice rules. This arrangement would enable the pharmacy to be housed on a temporary basis within the new Health Centre and thus provide continuity of services pending the outcome of any legal action. However because the ‘temporary re-location’ is time limited the pharmacist is required, when making application to the Pharmacy Board to undertake to return to his previous location at the end of the temporary period (which can be up to 12 months). This ‘undertaking to return’ presents the existing pharmacist with some difficulties in that the Skegoneill Health Centre will likely have been demolished by that time.

In discussions between the Trust’s solicitors and officers from the Council’s Legal Services Department and Estates Management Unit, officers undertook to seek Members views on an accommodation which would permit the pharmacist to give the necessary undertaking (regarding return to existing location) but would strictly limit the duration of any future trading from the Skegoneill site.

Certainly the absence of any pharmacy services at the Well-Being Centre (even on a temporary basis) would detract from the attractiveness of the facility as a one stop shop and to some extent undermine the key rationale on which the project is being promoted.

Key Issues

- Legal arrangements between the Belfast Social Care Trust and their selected pharmacist could come under legal challenge resulting in the short to medium term absence of pharmacy services at the Grove Well-Being Centre.
- To provide continuity of pharmacy service the Trust wish the use a 'temporary re-location' procedure which would allow the existing pharmacist to trade at the new Centre for a limited period.
- Under Pharmacy Board rules the temporary re-location requires undertakings by the pharmacist to return to the original location.
- As part of the arrangements associated with the provision of the Well-Being Centre the Council has acquired ownership of the Skegoneill Health Centre site. The Trust will be required to deliver this to the Council as a cleared site.
- The Council is being requested to agree in principle to allow return of the pharmacist to the Skegoneill site should that become necessary at the end of the 'temporary re-location' (max. period 12 months) from Skegoneill to Grove. Such return to be strictly limited to a period not exceeding nine months and subject to the pharmacist providing any necessary temporary accommodation, complying with all statutory requirements and paying an appropriate rent to the Council.

Resource Implications

Financial

None at this stage. No expenditure envisaged with potential short term income stream to Council.

Human Resources

No additional human resources required.

Asset and Other Implications

Short term impact on the ability of the Council to fully utilise the site of the Skegoneill Health Centre site which is currently being transferred to the Council from the BSCT.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to provide 'in principle' approval to permit a future short term arrangement, of up to nine months, with Dundee Pharmacy, in relation to the site of the present Skegoneill Health Centre, should such an arrangement become necessary and any arrangements with Dundee Pharmacy to be subject to terms as agreed by the Estates Manager and a legal agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services.

Key to Abbreviations

BSCT – Belfast Health and Social Care Trust”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

36th Ulster Division Memorial Association - Parade to the Cenotaph

The Committee granted approval to the 36th Ulster Division Memorial Association to organise a march and commemorative service at the City Hall Cenotaph on 31st July, 2008, subject to the Association obtaining the necessary approvals from the Parades Commission and the Police Service of Northern Ireland and to copies of those documents being made available to Council officers prior to the event.

Use of City Hall Grounds, Proms in the Park Concert

The Committee was reminded that from 2001 till 2006 the Council had hosted the BBC Proms in the Park concert in the grounds of the City Hall. During that period the event had attracted just under 30,000 people and had been broadcast to over 5 million people through the BBC's national television and world services. The event had generated an estimated £300,000 in additional economic activity in the City for each year it had been staged in Belfast. In 2007 the event had been moved outside Belfast due to the closure of the City Hall.

The Committee was advised that the Development Committee, at its meeting on 15th October, had approved plans to host the event at Queen's University and had agreed to provide funding in the sum of £80,000. However, due to operational difficulties, the University was now unable to accommodate the event and the BBC had requested the use of the City Hall grounds for the holding of the concert. This would entail the part closure of the grounds from 6th till 19th September, with the concert itself being staged on Saturday, 13th September.

The Committee approved the use of the City Hall grounds for the holding of the Proms in the Park concert.

Good Relations and Equality

(Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

Minutes of Good Relations Steering Panel

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Steering Panel held on 6th June.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Intersectoral Working for Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Older People Living in Belfast

(Ms. S. Wylie, Head of Environmental Health, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Northern Ireland has an increasing number of older people. Belfast has the lowest life expectancy for men and women in the EHSSB area and in Northern Ireland. Belfast City Council through its recent Corporate Plans has given commitment to improving the health, safety and wellbeing of older people in the City.

In 2006 Belfast Healthy Cities developed a Healthy Ageing InterAction Plan in partnership with agencies working in the EHSSB area. One of the key actions outlined in the InterAction plan was the establishment of a strategic multi agency group within each new Trust/ Council area that would develop collaborative approaches to addressing issues affecting older people; build capacity to strengthen engagement of older people and provide a mechanism to ensure older people can effectively influence the setting of priorities and development of services. In Belfast a Strategic Intersectoral Healthy Ageing Partnership is being established to take this work forward.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (November 2007) approved the Councils proposed approach to improving the health and wellbeing of the older people living in the City, which incorporated a strategic medium to long term plan covering four areas, namely Intersectoral Working, Citizenship, Improving Council Services and Advocacy.

Whilst work is progressing well in all of these areas this report is specifically about the intersectoral work and establishing a Strategic Healthy Ageing Partnership.

Key Issues

The aim of the Partnership is to improve the health and wellbeing of older people living in Belfast through a coordinated and joined up approach to the planning and delivery of services in the key areas that impact on older people.

The partnership will link into the Council's All Party Political Reference Group for Older People, re-established in October 2007. The partnership will also make connections with the Older People's Advocate which was recently advertised by OFMDFM and the Ageing in an Inclusive Society representative within OFMDFM.

A workshop was held in March 2008, Chaired by Councillor Diane Dodds, supported by Atlantic Philanthropies and other partners and attended by senior public sector representatives and older people to help identify the priorities for the work of the partnership. The following four priorities were identified:

- Joined up information and advice**
- Community Capacity building**
- Combating Social Isolation**
- Home services/ Care and repair**

The purpose of the partnership is to develop and agree an overall programme of work and success indicators with partners including the age sector that facilitates a multi agency, integrated approach to the planning of services initially under the four priority areas mentioned above.

Within this framework the partnership will:

- Ensure that the voice of older people is heard and has an input into the planning of services provided by the partner agencies. The intersectoral partnership is committed to developing older people's representation with existing age sector forums and voluntary partners as an integral part of the Intersectoral Partnership**
- Establish mechanisms that will provide linkages between older peoples' partnerships/groups and statutory organisations working with older people**

- Provide a coordinated interagency and or single agency response to issues and services directly affecting older people at a local level
- Identify and seek to replicate good practice across the city with the statutory and age sector
- Commission and review research on matters affecting older people (via partner organisations)
- Provide strategic input into the Council's reference group for older people
- Be a focal point for intersectoral information and communication
- Act as a congruent between the local and strategic level within partner organisations to influence change & develop innovative projects that will benefit older people
- Provide a vehicle for the monitoring of the delivery of actions as outlined in the Healthy Ageing InterAction plan (2006-2009) and be accountable to the cross party political reference group in Belfast City Council for the delivery of actions within the InterAction Plan that member organizations within the partnership have responsibility for. Older peoples consortia/partnerships will also be kept informed of progress on action within the Healthy Ageing InterAction plan (A mid way review report was completed and circulated December 2007)
- Exchange information and respond to developments/regional policy that will affect older people
- Link with community planning groups when they become established
- Commit to jointly identifying key aims and shared ownership of outcomes with age sector stakeholders and older people through intersectoral engagement

Membership will initially consist of representatives from Belfast City Council; Belfast Trust; Eastern Health and Social Services Board, NIHE; Belfast Healthy Cities, Transport; Age Concern and Help the Aged and chairs of Engage with Age and North and West Belfast Healthy Ageing Consortia.

Representatives from other organisations will be invited to participate and become members as appropriate.

The EHSSB has given a financial commitment to jointly fund with the Council a full time post over 3 years to coordinate and support the work of the partnership. This post has been given an indicative grade of PO3 grade (£31,516-£34,290). In addition the Board has also given commitment to part fund an administrative support post with an indicative grade of Scale 4 (£16,536-£18,430). The possibility of a jointly funded post was brought to the attention of this Committee in the November 2007 report.

If approval is granted by this Committee the Council will appoint the posts on behalf of the Partnership and line management will be provided through the Environmental Health Service.

Resource Implications

Financial

The main resource requirement will be one half of the employee costs over a three year period for both a co-ordinator post and an administrative support post. The cost to the Council would be approximately £25,000 per year for three years (with the normal annual increases). However, given the fact that it is unlikely that postholders would be recruited until the Autumn, the cost to the Council for this financial year would be in the region of £12,500.

This cost has not been explicitly included in the Revenue Estimates for 2008/2009 but could be included in the estimates for future years.

Human Resources

The posts of Older Peoples Co-ordinator and Administrative Support Officer would be appointed by the Council. .

Recommendations

Committee is asked to agree:

1. The Council's role in establishing a Strategic Healthy Ageing Partnership;
2. To the appointment of an Older Peoples Co-ordinator and an Administrative Support Officer for a three year period; and
3. To provide the finance to fund half the costs of these posts for a three year period.

Key to Abbreviations

- EHSSB** – Eastern Health and Social Services Board
OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister”

After discussion, during which the Members were advised that the terms of reference for the group would provide the All-Party Reference Group with an opportunity to request from various partner organisations an account of the provision of the services for which they were responsible under agreed action plans, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Consultation - Post Office Network Change Programme Northern Ireland

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th April, it had approved a response to the Post Office Limited’s consultation exercise on its Network for Change Programme – Area Plan Proposal for Northern Ireland. The Post Office had been proposing to close forty-two branches, ten of which were located within the Council area. Following the completion of the consultation exercise, there were now thirty-eight Post Office branches proposed for closure, nine of which were located within the Belfast City Council area, which was a reduction of one on the original proposal. The Post Office located at the Throne Centre, Whitewell Road would now not be closed.

Noted.

Request for Meeting – Royal Maternity Hospital Liaison Group

The Committee was advised that correspondence had been received from Councillor Attwood, on behalf of the Royal Maternity Hospital Liaison Group, seeking a meeting with the Committee to discuss the commitment to build a new regional hospital for children and women on the site of the Royal Group of Hospitals. The correspondence had indicated that, whilst the Minister for Health and Social Services and Public Safety had stated that the hospital was a priority, there had been no firm commitment given to meet the capital costs of the development, which had been estimated at £404 million. In addition, there was a question as to whether or not the Department had set aside funding to clear the Royal site, the estimated cost of which was £30 million. A decision regarding this funding was due to be made during the summer. The Group was seeking the support of the Council to ensure that the new women and children’s hospital would be built as soon as possible and that the money would be released to commence the clearance of the site.

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that, given the Council’s July recess, if the Committee were minded to hold a special meeting to receive representatives of the Group it would not be possible to have any decision ratified until the Council’s meeting scheduled to be held on 1st September. The view was expressed that it might be more appropriate to hold an informal meeting in the form of a briefing session to allow the Group to seek support from individual Members.

The Committee agreed to this course of action.

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Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th June, 2008

Old Museum Arts Centre

The Committee agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation from representatives of the Old Museum Arts Centre.

Chairman