

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 14th November, 2008

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCann (Deputy Chairman)
(in the Chair);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor D. Browne); and
Councillors Adamson, Attwood, M. Browne, W. Browne,
Convery, Kirkpatrick, Lavery, Long, Maginness,
C. Maskey, P. Maskey, McCann, Newton and Rodway.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Improvement;
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 Chairman (Councillor D. Dodds) and Councillor Smyth.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 17th and 24th October were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd November.

Modernisation and Improvement

Review of Public Administration - Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report which provided an update in relation to the Review of Public Administration:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The Review of Public Administration (RPA) process is now entering into the critical stage of implementation whereby legislation is being drafted, delivery structures established and active consideration being given to the transitional arrangements to be put in place to support local government reform within Northern Ireland.**

1.2 Members will note that there have been a number of developments in regard to the RPA since the last update provided to Committee at its meeting in October 2008.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Members will accept that the challenge ahead cannot be underestimated and ensuring that the Council is engaged within the process is paramount to ensuring that the best interests of the citizen, the Council and wider local government sector is pursued throughout the process.

2.2 Legislative Timetable – Critical Path

2.2.1 It is important to recognise that the key driver for the RPA process over the next 6-12 months will be the need to meet the legislative timetable. The current legislative timetable is as follows:

1. Local Government (Contracts) Bill	July 2009
2. Local Government (Modernisation) Bill	January 2010
3. Local Government (Finance) Bill	April 2010
4. Local Government (Re-organisation) Bill	May 2011

Other key milestones in the process are as follows:

▪ Final Report of Boundaries Commissioner	June 2009
▪ Report of District Electoral Area Commissioner	July 2010
▪ Local Government Elections	May 2011

2.2.2 A briefing paper (SLB 52/2008) and associated RPA critical path timeline which had been submitted by the joint NILGA/DoE Secretariat for the consideration of the Strategic Leadership Board at its meeting on 7th November has been circulated.

2.3 Update on Policy Development Panels

2.3.1 Members will note that it is intended that the initial proposals emerging from the three Policy Development Panels in regard to the necessary Primary (enabling) Legislation will be submitted for the consideration of the RPA Strategic Leadership Board at its meeting in November 2008, and subsequently submitted to the NI Assembly for consideration in advance of the proposals being issued for formal consultation (3 months period) in early 2009.

- 2.3.2 Members will note further that subordinate legislation has still to be drafted which will provide greater detail around the emerging proposals and take account of the practical implementation issues. Accordingly, it will be important that the Council continue to be actively engaged (at both elected Member and Officer level) within the Policy Development Panels and the other RPA implementation structures established (refer to point 2.4 below).
- 2.3.3 PDP A (Governance, Community Planning, Central-Local Government Relations) has set out its initial proposals in relation to high level governance arrangements for the new Councils, post 2011 (considering issues such as decision-making structures, proportionality, standards, codes of conduct, oversight and transparency); the framework for the council-led community planning process; and has set out the proposed framework for the formalisation of relations between central and local government i.e. establishment of a statute based Partnership Panel along the lines of the Welsh model.
- 2.3.4 At this stage there are no formal proposals being put forward by PDP C (Service Delivery) for the consideration of the RPA Strategic Leadership Board. Nevertheless, work is ongoing in regards to the development of, for example, a draft Customer Service strategy, draft IS Strategy etc. A series of sub-groups have been established to take these issues forward and, again, the Council is actively engaged within these groups to ensure, as is reasonably possible, alignment with the Councils own improvement activities.
- 2.3.5 PDP C (Structural Reform) has set out its emerging policy proposals relating to those structural reform elements which require primary legislation in the areas of human resources, capacity building, finance, estates, regional and sub-regional design and the transfer of functions from central to local government. Examples of some of the areas identified as requiring primary legislation include: enabling the effective transfer of staff, assets and resources; necessary provisions to allow for the payment of compensation in relation to the early release of staff; necessary provisions to enable transferring departments to make grants to fund certain functions transferring to the new councils etc.

2.4 RPA Implementation Structures

- 2.4.1 Correspondence has recently been received, dated 27th October, from the Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, MLA, in regard to his proposals for the implementation of the Local Government Reform Programme.

- 2.4.2 The Minister has indicated that statutory Transition Committees will be introduced for the 11 council areas in advance of the new Councils being elected in May 2011 and that there will be no shadow council period after the May 2011 elections with the new councils assuming full power and responsibility on the fourth day after polling day.
- 2.4.3 The Minister has also stated that each Transition Committee, one for each new council area, will consist of no more than 16 councillors, with an initial resource package of £150,000 made available to all the cluster Councils to pay for change management, staff and additional allowances to Members for sitting on the Transition Committees.

Transition Management Teams

- 2.4.4 The Transition Committees would be supported by a Transition Management Team comprising of senior management representatives from the merging Councils. The Transition Management Team will have responsibility for the ongoing operational management of the transition at the local level and will work under the direction of the Transition Committee.
- 2.4.5 The Department of Environment has issued initial guidance on the establishment of Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams. It is intended that the guidance will support a consistent approach across all council areas to the establishment of such structures.

Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group

- 2.4.6 In his correspondence, dated 27th October, the Environment Minister outlined his intention to establish a Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group to support the RPA transitional process and to provide advice and detailed guidance to the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and Transitional Committees on implementation and transitional matters.
- 2.4.7 The Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group will provide the essential interface between the strategic policy direction set by the Strategic Leadership Board and its Policy Development Panels, and the local policy set by the Transition Committees and their operational delivery teams (the Transition Management Teams). The Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group will be responsible to the Strategic Leadership Board for co-ordinating and supporting the consistent implementation of the regional reform policies across the 11 council areas.

2.4.8 It would be the intention that the Group would be chaired by Paul Simpson (the Deputy Secretary of the DoE) and comprise of senior officials from transferring function Departments, 3 local government Chief Executives and representatives from other key stakeholder groups e.g. Local Government Staff Commission, NILGA etc.

2.4.9 Members will note that the Society of Local Government Chief Executives has nominated The Chief Executive of Belfast City Council as the deputy chair of the Group.

2.5 Belfast Transition Arrangements

2.5.1 The guidance issued by the DoE recognises that as Belfast City Council will not merge with any other Council it 'will require its own Transition Committee arrangement; the detail of the Belfast approach can be developed in due course but the principles which are set out in the paper should apply where appropriate'.

2.5.2 It is suggested that the Council nominate the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as its Transition Committee. The Committee is already constituted under proportionality principles. It is further suggested that for the duration of the RPA process until May 2011, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee should meet twice a month with one meeting designated to deal with the transition issues set out in the attached guidance. Members of the Committee will be entitled to an additional allowance of £2,700 per annum. This should be paid to the existing Members of the Committee from the date the DoE indicate they are content that the Council should use an additional Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting as the Transition Committee. Members will be aware that membership of the Committees in the Council will be subject to review by the Council in May 2009.

2.6 Transfer of Functions

2.6.1 Members will note that whilst Policy Development Panel C (Structural Reform) had originally been tasked with drafting the necessary policies and legislation to support the transfer of functions from central to local government, recent discussions with DoE officials has reported that it would not be the intention to take forward a single tranche of legislation to cover the transfer of functions, but rather, each transferring department would take forward individual tranches of legislation to enable the transfer of functions.

2.6.2 Members will accept that caution should be taken to ensure that such a fragmented approach to taking forward necessary legislation does not result in any dilution or delay in the transfer of functions to local government. It is suggested that a more appropriate approach may be to take forward a combined Local Government Transfer of Functions (NI) Order which would reflect the approach applied in the 1972 reform of local government in Northern Ireland.

2.6.3 Notwithstanding, the Environment Minister has written to all Ministerial colleagues stating his support for the statement of principles to underpin the transfer of functions developed by NILGA on behalf of local government. The principles are centred on openness of approach, consistency with the Ministerial statement to the Assembly on 31 March 2008 and ongoing consultation with the sector throughout the process. In his correspondence the Minister has encouraged his Ministerial colleagues to support these principles as we move into the implementation phase of the local government restructuring programme.

2.7 Severance Scheme for Elected members and Co-Option

2.7.1 The Environment Minister has indicated that the details of a proposed severance scheme for Councillors will be issued for consultation by the end of the year. It is our understanding that the Secretary of State is currently considering the introduction of legislation which would allow co-option onto Councils simultaneously to the enactment of the severance scheme legislation.

2.8 Internal Support Structures

2.8.1 Inevitably, the level of RPA related activity will grow in intensity and scope throughout the transitional period and its management and delivery must be adequately resourced and co-ordinated. The Council will need to take forward its internal preparation and changes required to support an effective RPA transition as well as ensuring that it engages within the delivery structures established to take forward the RPA.

2.8.2 It would be the intention that a series of focused task and finish officer working groups would be established to examine in detail the key emerging issues and to liaise with elected Members to formulate corporate positions as required.

2.8.3 The Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be continually engaged within the RPA process and political direction sought as required. This is further facilitated by the fact that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee now meet twice a month enabling greater discussion around the RPA and associated issues.

3.0 Resource Implications

Whilst there is clearly substantial Human Resource and financial implications attached the Council's ongoing involvement and management of the RPA change process, it will be difficult to quantify until a detailed programme of work is put in place.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (a) note the contents of this report;**
- (b) determine whether they wish to nominate the additional meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as the Council's Transition Committee and write to the Environment Minister to agree the Terms of Reference for the Committee."**

The Chief Executive explained that the Minister for the Environment had proposed the introduction of Statutory Transition Committees, as opposed to shadow Councils, for the eleven new District Council Areas to oversee the implementation of the Local Government Reform Programme. An amount of £150,000 would be made available to each Council to resource the change management implications, staffing and the payment of an additional allowance of £2,700 to each Member who sat on the Transition Committee.

The Department of the Environment had recognised that, since Belfast would not merge with any other Council, it would require its own Transition Committee arrangements. Therefore, it was suggested that the Council should nominate the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as the Council's Transition Committee. The Chief Executive reminded the Members that it had been agreed recently to hold two meetings per month of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and that the additional meeting could be used for the meeting of the Transition Committee. He indicated that he would speak to representatives of the Department of the Environment and write to the Minister on the Terms of Reference for the Committee, which would be brought back to the Committee for approval.

The Committee agreed that the Council be recommended to appoint the Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as the Council's Transition Committee, the additional meeting of the Committee be used for the meetings of the Transition Committee and a letter be forwarded to the Minister with responsibility for the Department of the Environment to agree the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

Democratic Services and Governance

Publishing of Committee Reports on Modern.gov

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members may recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 21st September, 2007, approved a policy to publish Committee reports to the internet at the same time as the publication of the minutes, that is, after the monthly Council Meeting, omitting those reports which could be justifiably excluded.

However, it is considered that the time is now right to reconsider this policy in light of the need for the tracking of Committee decisions, the Council’s commitment to openness and transparency as part of its customer focus and the anticipated forthcoming changes to Governance arrangements for the new Councils post 2011.

Key Issues

Governance Arrangements post 2011

The Committee will be aware of the framework which has been established to prepare for the reduction from 26 to 11 Councils in 2011. A number of Policy Development Panels have been established by the Department of the Environment to consider different issues and one such Panel is developing protocols and procedures for Governance, Community Planning and Central/Local Relations.

This Panel has produced a paper setting out its proposals around governance for the new Councils in which there is a clear acceptance of a high level principle of openness and transparency in decision-making. Although there are not yet formal proposals as to how this principle should be applied to Council and Committee meetings, it seems reasonable to assume that, at the very least, Councils will be required to make their Committee reports available to the public prior to the meetings taking place.

It is anticipated that the Council will in 2011 be required to make a policy shift to a system of publishing its Committee reports in advance of meetings and it is considered that it would be better for the Council to lead on this matter of its own accord rather than being forced to comply. In this way, Belfast can again be seen to be leading on policy development and it will place us in a better position to influence the ultimate outcome of the consideration of governance arrangements in the run-up to 2011.

The Council's Commitment to Openness and Transparency

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, at its meeting on 23rd May, adopted a set of recommendations of the Audit Panel in relation to a Code of Governance for the Council. Part of that Code committed the Council to 'taking informed, transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny.....' It is certainly the case that the simultaneous publication of Committee reports would be in line with this commitment.

The Council is also in the process of gathering information in order to review its customer focus. While not wishing to anticipate the outcome of the review, there would certainly be an expectation that members of the public should be provided with as much information as possible about the Council's decision-making processes and the simultaneous publication of Committee reports would be consistent with a customer-focussed service delivery.

Technical Considerations

It should be remembered that the Modern.Gov system has been developed primarily for use by Councils in England and Wales where there is a legislative requirement to publish Committee papers before the meetings take place. One of the key advantages of the system is that it operates on the basis of simultaneous publication to both the intranet and internet sites. Requiring the system to separate the internal publication from the external publication, as we have had to do in order to adhere to the current policy, has led to a number of operating problems. It is anticipated that a decision to move to the simultaneous publication of reports, in preparation for the commencement of the tracking of Committee decisions, would make the operation more straightforward and streamlined and prove to be less time consuming.

Implications for Members

It should be noted that, as the Committee reports will be available publicly before the meetings take place, there will in all likelihood be increased contact with Committee Members, and particularly Chairmen, by the media and the public seeking to either ascertain opinions on issues to be discussed or to elicit a view as to the decision which the Committee may take. Most Members will be happy to receive such enquiries and will be able to respond by merely emphasising that views expressed are either their own personal opinion or that of their Party and ought not to be construed as the stance which the particular Committee might take. However, if Members wish to receive any additional advice or direct training on the handling of such enquiries, then this can be arranged on request.

Resource Implications

There would not be any resource implications arising from a decision to publish Committee reports to the Internet at the same time as the Intranet. In fact, there would be a saving in terms of staff time.

Recommendation

That a policy of openness and transparency in the Council's decision-making processes be adopted by agreeing to publish simultaneously to the Internet and Intranet in advance of meetings taking place Committee summonses and reports (excluding those reports or parts thereof which are restricted under the publications policy)."

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Requests for the use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality

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

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Queen's University Belfast	The Universities' Personnel Association Annual Conference 14th May, 2009 Approximately 250 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception.	It is estimated that 200 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 £1,000 Approximate budget remaining £166,730
Victoria College Belfast	150th Anniversary Gala Dinner 27th March, 2009 Approximately 400 attending	The provision of hospitality in the form of a pre- dinner drinks reception.	This event seeks to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Victoria College Belfast and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city.	The provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,600 Approximate budget remaining £165,130

Organisation/ Body	Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Northern Ireland Bowling Association	Centenary Dinner 22nd October, 2010 Approximately 250 attending	The 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 the Northern Ireland Bowling Association and to acknowledge its contribution to the general life and well-being of the city.	The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of wines and soft drinks. Approximate cost £1,000 Approximate budget remaining £164,130

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Finance

Requests for Funding – Be Your Best Foundation

The Committee was advised that a request for financial assistance had been received from the Be Your Best Foundation in respect of the Belfast Rock Challenge, a drug and crime prevention event, which was scheduled to be held in the Belfast Waterfront Hall in 2009.

The Committee was advised that legal opinion had been sought and the Council could, if it so wished, use Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to make financial contributions of this nature. Accordingly, it was recommended that funding in the sum of £3,000 be awarded to the Be Your Best Foundation.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and

Resolved – That funding of £3,000 be approved in respect of the aforementioned event under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to the District, and inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefits so accruing would be commensurate with the payments to be made.

Efficiency Programme

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Programme of Efficiencies for 2009/10:

“Purpose

Policy and Resources Committee agreed that the Council will make £3.0 million efficiency savings over the period 2006/07 – 2008/09. Over this period the Director of Corporate Services has reported cash savings amounting to £3.87m. In November 2007, Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed a further efficiency target of £1.0m per annum for the period 2009/10-2011/12.

The purpose of this report is to discuss the efficiency programme for 2009/10.

Relevant Background Information

Capturing of Savings

It is important to note that the £1,762,873 savings are cash savings. This means that they will be captured as part of the rate setting process which ensures that they are directly passed on to the ratepayer.

Efficiency Programme 2009/10

The table below summarises the efficiency programme for 2009/10.

Efficiency Area	£
Insurances	482,000
Stationery	128,723
Personal computers	105,839
Department Contributions	
• Health & Environmental Services	770,000
• CIT	200,000
• Development	76,311
Total Efficiency Savings	1,762,873
Rates income from vacant property	2,700,000

A brief description of each efficiency area is provided below.

Insurances

Insurance costs have been reduced from £1,552,000 in 2008/09 to £1,070,000 for 2009/10 – giving a cash saving of £482,000. This has been achieved by tendering the insurance broker services and several of the Council’s insurance policies. This resulted in reduced broker and premium costs.

Procurement

The Procurement Unit carried out two reverse auctions for stationery and personal computers. A reverse auction is where suppliers bid on a real time basis for a contract. These auctions are most effective where a detailed specification can be put together in terms of volume and quality. The savings achieved for these two auctions amount to £128,723 for stationery and £105,839 for personal computers.

Departmental Contributions

Four departments have provided estimates for 2009/10 which in real terms show net expenditure savings. These are:

Health & Environmental Services - £770,000. These savings have been produced in the budget areas of employee costs, activity-based modelling of landfill contract costs, segregated waste and compensation claims.

CIT - £200,000. These savings have been achieved through increased rental income following rent reviews on a number of units in the Council's industrial estates and a reduction in employee costs.

Development - £76,311 employee cost savings.

Rates income from vacant property

A new contribution to the efficiency programme is the work the Council has been doing to ensure that collectable rate income is maximised. Each year the Council loses millions from vacant properties. In the case of domestic properties, where a property is currently vacant no rates are paid and for non-domestic properties half the rates are paid. It is therefore in the interest of the Council to ensure that all properties defined as vacant are actually vacant. The Council's Building Control Unit inspected around 12,000 vacant properties and found that 51% were in fact occupied. This information was passed to LPS so that rates bills could be issued. This work resulted in an additional £2.7m rates income. Currently Building Control is carrying out a second phase of vacant inspections and this will hopefully lead to a reduction in the amount of lost rates income from vacant properties which will therefore help to produce a more favourable EPP for 2009/10.

Efficiency Programme Post 2009/10

The efficiency programme to date has been relatively non-threatening to the organisation and to individual services. The opportunities, however, for realising savings through improved budgetary control are diminishing. This means that a more strategic approach to efficiency will be required which will involve both changing how we do things today and progressively making fundamental changes to the Council's business operation. The Chief Executive has already commissioned an external review of the centre of the organisation and it is anticipated that this will deliver significant efficiency savings. The outcome of this report will be discussed with the party groups and the presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval. As part of the Corporate Plan the Council is committed to develop a value for money framework and a critical issue for the review of the centre to address is to create a resource dedicated to efficiency.

It is clear that budgetary constraints are being felt across the public sector in the region. This will have an impact on how other agencies are spending and will impact on Council services that trade externally and receive external income. Information Services Belfast (ISB) is one of these services with customers locally and in England and Wales. ISB is undertaking a review of its service as changes in the market have meant a significant decrease in forecasted income. This downturn in income means the service has to consider ways of decreasing expenditure and increasing its return to the Council. The outcome of the review will be presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

Recommendations

1. Agree the programme of efficiencies for 2009/10 as outlined in the report.
2. Note the work already underway to realise future savings."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Human Resources

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

The Belfast Wheel

(Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 24th March, 2006, it had granted authority for the installation in the grounds of the City Hall at Donegall Square East of the 60 metre high Belfast Wheel, with a further extension for the use of the grounds for the Wheel having been agreed by the Committee on 14th December, 2007.

The Head of Economic Initiatives advised the Members that, to date, the Wheel had been popular with visitors and attracted positive media attention. Due to the considerable success of the project, the operators of the Belfast Wheel, World Tourist Attractions, had requested that the Council consider a further extension from the end of December, 2008 until August, 2009. She pointed out that this would require not only Council approval but an extension to the current planning consent which would be sought from the Northern Ireland Planning Service. There would be no additional cost to the Council. However, the operator had agreed to pay to the Council £4,166 plus VAT per month from January to August, 2009.

After discussion, the Committee determined that it would offer no objection to an extension until August, 2009 and agreed that further negotiations be undertaken in relation to the fees to be paid.

City Hall Tours and Themes

(Mr. G. Wright, Head of Facilities Management, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant background information

Members will be aware that the City Hall is one of the principal tourist destinations in Belfast, and that tour numbers have been increasing significantly in recent years. By way of illustration, in the year ended 31st March 2007 a total of 56,200 visitors took public tours of the building, up by 30% from the 43,070 visitors who took tours in the previous year.

It is clearly important to maintain and indeed enhance the City Hall’s position as one of the premier tourist attractions in the city, however a number of factors militate against this which the current closure provides opportunities to address. The main problems are:-

- **many areas of the building are in use during the tours and consequently the art & artefacts located in these areas can’t be viewed by visitors (86% of tours could not access all areas in a recent survey);**

- the current tour route provides a somewhat disjointed view of the building;
- the various items of historical and cultural significance are distributed throughout the building, rather than being drawn together in meaningful themes; *and*
- some items would benefit by being on permanent public display.

Consequently the Facilities Management tours staff have been working on proposals to improve the situation during the closure. In doing so they have been guided by the recommendations of the Advisory Panel on City Hall Memorabilia, approved by the Committee in February 2003.

This Panel's recommendations included the following:-

- as the signing of the Covenant in 1912 was one of the most significant events in the history of Northern Ireland the Covenant table should be located in a prominent location and highlighted with appropriate signage;
- the setting up of a 'Freemen of the City' exhibit. An interesting display to make history come alive should be centred around a few personalities who have been awarded the honour;
- the Robing Room (which was considered by the Panel to be a very 'bland' area) should be used for displaying art & artefacts currently in storage or not in the public view; and
- developing a photographic display or collages depicting contemporary significant figures or local achievers: the display would be of particular interest to the younger people in the city.

While many of the short-term recommendations made by the Panel have already been implemented the above issues remain outstanding, and clearly the closure represents the best opportunity to take them forward. It is therefore proposed that the following themed areas be created within the building:

1. the history of the City Hall (located in the marble area);
2. our 'Freedom of the City' recipients (located in the Rotunda area);

- 3. Belfast in the 2 World Wars (located in the Rotunda area);**
- 4. notable Belfast citizens (located in the Reception Hall);**
- 5. the Titanic & Belfast's Lord Mayors (located in the Banqueting Hall);**
- 6. the civic regalia (located in the Robing Room); and**
- 7. display of gifts received by the city (located in the East Entrance area).**

In order to give effect to these themes the a number of changes would be required in terms of the use and positioning of existing art and artefacts, of which the following are the most notable:-

- the Covenant table will remain in the Council Chamber but would be supplemented with archive photographs of the signing of the covenant in 1912, new signage and additional historical material while tours are in progress;**
- the civic regalia including maces, chains of office and robes currently stored in the Lord Mayor's Parlour would be moved to public view in the Robing Room;**
- the Seaman Magennis portrait would be moved from the Robing Room to the Rotunda;**
- a number of items connected with the Freedom of the City including caskets and scrolls currently in the Reception Hall and crystal in the Lord Mayor's Parlour and silver keys currently in storage would be brought together in a display on the Rotunda;**
- the 'No Mean City' display (suitably updated) which was previously located on the ground floor west corridor would be moved to the Reception Hall to form the central part of a Belfast Citizens exhibit;**
- a number of items connected with the history of the City Hall including the black and white photographs in the Robing Room and the charters, silver trowel and gavel in the Reception Hall would be brought together and put on permanent display in dedicated display cases in the marble area;**
- the portraits of Sir Edward Harland and Viscount & Viscountess Pirrie currently in the Council Chamber & Reception Hall would be moved to the Banqueting Hall; and**

- a number of crystal and silver items presented to the city and currently in storage or in the Lord Mayor's Parlour would be brought together in the East Entrance area.

The location of some exhibits is linked to existing fixtures in the City Hall such as stained glass windows. Others such as the civic regalia sit naturally in the Robing Room which is adjacent to the Council Chamber and the Lord Mayor's Parlour. Having some of the themed displays in mobile cases will allow exhibits to be moved around the building, and this will be particularly beneficial when specific areas are being used for functions.

(It should be noted that, if the proposal to establish a coffee-shop facility in the City Hall and to 'theme' the area (e.g. Titanic theme) proceeds, this may have an effect on the siting of some specific items which may consequently differ somewhat from the locations set out above).

The tour script and route will be revised and changed to link in with the themed displays, however the length of the tour will still be approximately 40-45 minutes. The re-displaying of items will give an opportunity to work towards the achievement of a more balanced and inclusive display which represents all aspects of former and contemporary life in Belfast. New signage and free-standing visitor floor plans will also be used throughout the building in order to improve the visitor experience.

Before the City Hall re-opens the opportunity will also be taken to clean and carry out restoration work on many of the Council's art & artefacts, and also to create an updated inventory of all items held. Over 1,300 art & artefact items were removed from the City Hall and placed in climate-controlled stores. Each item has been checked for damage and many items have been photographed as part of the computerisation of our inventory database, which is now complete.

Key Issues

An opportunity now exists, in the context of the City Hall closure, to improve the tour offering to visitors and at the same time to implement a number of the outstanding recommendations of the Advisory Panel on City Hall Memorabilia.

Resources Implications

Financial

There will be no direct costs associated with the movement of items in line with the recommendations set out above, but additional cost will be incurred in terms of additional bespoke display and signage facilities, cleaning and restoration work and in the development of a computerised inventory application.

The overall costs are therefore estimated to be in the region of £71,000, and provision has been made in the unit's revenue budget for this.

Human Resources

There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report. All tours will continue to be delivered by dedicated BCC personnel, as at present.

Asset & other implications

There are no direct asset implications arising from this report, which does not involve any significant changes to the fabric of the building or its systems & services.

Recommendations & Decisions

It is recommended that the opportunity is taken during the closure to rationalize and improve the City Hall tour offering through the creation of the themed areas and displays outlined above. This will also provide an opportunity to implement some of the outstanding recommendations of the Advisory Panel on City Hall Memorabilia.

To achieve a fully balanced and inclusive display, it is further recommended that the six elected Members of the Good Relations Partnership act as a cross-party reference group in any future discussions regarding the display of City Hall memorabilia in the longer term. This will ensure that the City Hall is as welcoming and as representative of our community as possible, in line with previous Council decisions."

After discussion, during which a number of Members stressed the importance of an early meeting of the cross-party reference group and the agreement of a programme of work and acquisition of materials which would ensure that the items on display in the City Hall were representative of all communities in the City, the Committee adopted the recommendations. It was also agreed that the reference group should review existing budgets to create and acquire suitable items for display in the City Hall.

Estates Issues

Northern Ireland Electricity Cable at Duncrue Industrial Estate

The Members were advised that the Council was committed to the installation of an electricity cable to service the development of the North Foreshore. The cable would link that site with the Northern Ireland Electricity Sub-Station on Skegoneill Street in order to provide and facilitate the export of electricity from the landfill gas generating plant to the national grid. Several potential cable routes had been considered and it had been established that the most efficient and cost effective route for the Council would be predominantly over public roads.

However, there was one location where Northern Ireland Electricity would require an easement over privately held lands. This was in the Duncrue Industrial Estate where a plot of land in the ownership of the Council had been leased to Action Mental Health. Under the Council's cable provision agreement with Northern Ireland Electricity in respect of the North Foreshore the Council was liable for the cost of obtaining the easement and, following negotiations with Action Mental Health's estate agent, compensation had been agreed in the sum of £15,000 plus reasonable agent's and legal costs which had still to be agreed. This would be more than compensated for by the income which was expected from the electricity which would be generated from landfill gas at the North Foreshore.

The Committee granted approval to the Northern Ireland cable easement at Duncrue Estate.

Acquisition of Additional Land at McCrory Park

In accordance with Standing Order 60, the Committee was notified that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 14th February, had agreed to the acquisition of an additional portion of land of approximately 0.16 acres at McCrory Park at nil cost to the Council.

Proposed Wayleave at the Waterworks

The Committee was reminded that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 7th November, 2006, had approved a number of arrangements with Cliftonville Football Club and its contractor to allow access across Council-owned lands in connection with the construction and subsequent use of a new spectators' stand at Cliftonville Football ground. The Council had been approached by the Club recently with a new request to provide a sewer wayleave across Council lands within the Waterworks site. The sewers would be installed as part of the new stand development at the football ground. The installation of the sewer across Council-owned land had been selected by the Club on the basis that it would have been more expensive for them to lay the sewer in the opposite direction through their own land and out onto a public street. On that basis, the Estates Management Unit had negotiated a payment of £3,000 from the Club. Installation of the proposed sewers would involve fencing the immediate surrounding area for a period of approximately two weeks. Appropriate reinstatement of the lands would be a requirement of any agreement reached with Cliftonville Football Club.

The Committee approved the installation at the Waterworks of a combined foul and storm sewer to agreed specifications at the location on terms to be agreed by the Estates Manager and incorporated into an appropriate legal agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services.

**Proposed Contractor's Compound
at Annadale Embankment**

The Committee was advised that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 15th May, had authorised officers to act to protect the Council's property interests through discussions with the Carville Group, which was developing 216 apartments on land adjoining Council-owned land at Annadale Embankment. Discussions with the Carville Group remained on-going in relation to a number of issues. However, at this stage officers had agreed outline terms with the Group which would allow it to occupy the Council's land on a temporary basis during the construction of the apartment development. The main terms which had been agreed were that the Carville Group:

- (i) would take responsibility for the entirety of the area of approximately 1.21 acres;
- (ii) expected to cease occupation of the site on 31st October, 2009 but had sought some flexibility in regard to that timescale;
- (iii) would hand back the land to the Council after it had been duly landscaped in accordance with its planning permission and as agreed with the Parks and Leisure Department; and
- (iv) would pay the Council a Licence Fee of £30,000 per annum for the use of the area of land identified.

The Committee approved the outline terms in respect of the temporary use of the area at the Annadale Embankment, subject to such terms being incorporated in an appropriate Licence Agreement to be drawn up by the Director of Legal Services.

**Proposed Lease to the British Broadcasting
Corporation of Rooms in the Ulster Hall**

The British Broadcasting Corporation had leased previously a room in the Ulster Hall for use as a recording studio to control the broadcasting of performances held at the Hall. The termination of the leasing agreement had been approved by the former Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls Board on 30th August, 2006 in order to facilitate the planned refurbishment of the Ulster Hall. Following completion of the work at the Ulster Hall, terms had now been agreed with the Corporation's agent for a new 10 year lease for a studio and store located on the second floor of the Ulster Hall. The proposed lease would commence on 1st January, 2009 at an agreed rent of £2,500 per annum which would be reviewable after five years. The Corporation would pay also an annual service charge to cover the costs of heating and the cleaning and maintenance of common areas and would be responsible for rates and internal repairs plus insurance of its fittings and contents. The lease would provide a two month rent-free period at its commencement to allow for fitting out by the Corporation. The terms of the agreement would provide also an opportunity for the lease to be terminated by the Corporation after a period of five years.

The Committee approved the leasing of the premises at the Ulster Hall to the British Broadcasting Corporation for a term of 10 years at an initial rent of £2,500 per annum, subject to the incorporation of the outline terms and to the completion of an appropriate legal agreement to be prepared by the Director of Legal Services.

Good Relations and Equality

Good Relations Partnership

The Committee approved the minutes of the Good Relations Partnership of 7th November.

Chairman