

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 20th March, 2009

Meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Members present: Councillor McCann (Deputy Chairman) (in the Chair); and Councillors Adamson, Attwood, W. Browne, Crozier, N. Kelly, Kirkpatrick, Lavery, C. Maskey, P. Maskey, 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. S. McCrory, Principal Committee Administrator; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor D. Dodds) and Councillors M. Browne and Convery.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th February were taken as read and signed as corrected. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd March, subject to:

- (i) the omission of the minute under the heading "Replacement Fuel Facility at Duncrue Complex" which, at the request of Councillor Crozier, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration; and
- (ii) an amendment to the Council's response to the Big Lottery Big Thinking Consultation Document to provide that it include a request that applications submitted to the Fund which claimed to have partners associated with the project be vetted to ensure that the Partnership arrangements are, in fact, in place.

Councillors Convery and Moore

The Committee was advised that both Councillors Convery and Moore were in hospital and the Deputy Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, requested that the Committee's best wishes be conveyed to them.

Replacement Fuel Facility at Duncrue Complex

The Committee agreed to defer for one month further consideration of the minute of the meeting of 20th February under the heading "Replacement Fuel Facility at Duncrue Complex" to enable further information to be obtained and a report thereon to be submitted to the Committee in April.

Notice of Motion: Vehicle Fleet - Carbon Emissions

(Mr. W. Francey, Director of Health and Environmental Services, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information"

At the Council meeting of 2nd March 2009, Councillor Mullaghan proposed the following notice of motion: *'As a contribution to its climate change agenda, Belfast City Council commits to a review of the options for reducing carbon emissions from its vehicle fleet, with a view to adopting a strategy with defined targets, the report on the review to be submitted to the Council within six months'*.

The 2008 'State of the Environment Report' from DoE NI highlights that carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the most prevalent greenhouse gas in Northern Ireland, accounting for nearly three quarters of all greenhouse gas emissions. Sectoral analysis reveals that one third of emissions are attributable to road transport. Although some vehicle tailpipe emissions have declined in recent years due to advances in engine technology, increased vehicle mileage has meant that overall Northern Ireland transport emissions have increased from 3,985 kt CO₂e in 2000 to 4,800 kt CO₂e in 2006. As a significant vehicle fleet operator, the Council is therefore clearly in a position to demonstrate leadership in relation to this important climate change issue.

Members will also be aware that the Council is finalising a revised Transport Policy with the assistance of consultants, which will articulate the Council's transport vision, both for the City and for its own operational activities until 2015. A technical component of the draft revised transport policy is an assessment of possible opportunities for the Council to reduce emissions associated with its operational activities. It is anticipated that the draft transport policy will be presented to Council for consideration in May 2009.

Key Issues

Consumption of diesel fuel by the Council's vehicle fleet results in approximately 3,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions annually. Options for reducing overall vehicle fleet carbon

emissions include reducing the amount of fuel consumed through improved vehicle utilisation or reducing overall distance travelled, adopting lower carbon or alternative fuels, introducing newer engine technologies or employing carbon offsetting.

Development of a strategy with specific targets for the reduction of vehicle fleet carbon emissions, as proposed by Councillor Mullaghan in the notice of motion, would inevitably involve a review of the available options, their associated environmental benefits and financial costs. As this is also likely to be required in due course to progress implementation of the Council's revised transport policy the Committee may wish to consider agreeing that a preliminary high-level review of options be undertaken through the Council's Sustainable Development Steering Group. Appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise exist within this group that would enable a report on such a high level review to be presented to Committee within two to three months. By that time, the Council is likely to have adopted a final revised transport policy and decisions could then be taken to authorise further work with external assistance as necessary to implement the notice of motion in the context of the relevant parts of the new Council transport policy.

Resource Implications

There are no additional financial resource implications associated with the recommendations. Officer time required to complete such a review can be accommodated in the timescale described with the bulk of the work being undertaken by the Council's Sustainable Development Manager. Potential implications in terms of the Council's vehicle assets would be highlighted as part of the review of options and further teased out in any subsequent detailed report.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider authorising the preparation of a preliminary high-level review of options for reducing carbon emissions from its vehicle fleet with the report being submitted to the Committee for consideration within two to three months.

Key to Abbreviations

DoE – Department of Environment
CO₂ – carbon dioxide”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Finance

Funding Proposal for the Museum Arts Centre

The Committee was advised that representatives of the Museum Arts Centre were in attendance regarding a funding proposal to the Council for the new Museum Arts Centre.

Prior to the deputation being admitted, a Member pointed out that the Committee had agreed previously to fund the Museum Arts Centre and sought clarification in this regard.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the Committee, at its meeting on 19th October, 2007, had agreed, in principle, that funding be provided to the City Centre Arts Project, subject to detailed negotiations and final approval by the Council on the amount of funding and the schedule of payments. That decision had been affirmed at its meeting on 14th December when funding for the Lyric Theatre had been agreed. He explained that, since the Committee had still to agree on the amount of funding and, as representatives of the Museum Arts Centre were in attendance to make a presentation, it would be appropriate for the Committee to receive them to enable it to make an informed decision on the appropriate level of funding. Accordingly, Ms. G. Mitchell and Messrs. J. Minne and B. Todd were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Minne, with assistance of visual aids, reviewed the proposed location of the building and outlined the amount of theatre space and available exhibition space which would be provided. He highlighted the forecasted audience figures, how the centre would assist in the regeneration of the area and the training and employment opportunities which would be made available. He stated that the total cost of the project was £17.7 million and the current shortfall of funding was £2,211,627, of which £552, 906 (25%) was being sought from the Council.

He concluded by stating that, if the Council was minded to approve the funding request, then the Museum Arts Centre would have raised over 95% of the committed costs and therefore would be allowed to enter into a contract with the project's preferred building contractor. In addition, guaranteed funding from the Council would enable other private sector funders to be attracted to the project.

The deputation then answered a number of questions from the Members and retired from the meeting.

The Committee then proceeded to consider the undernoted report in relation to the funding proposal:

“Background

The issue of lack of cultural infrastructure in Belfast has been a concern for Belfast City Council for nearly 20 years. The Council's own contribution to that infrastructure – the Waterfront Hall has created new standards in what was needed for the City. The success of the Waterfront Hall raised further debate in Council and resulted in the commissioning of 2 major reports – a review of performing arts venues and one of visual arts promotion in the City.

The review of performing arts known as the Southwood Review was jointly commissioned by Belfast City Council and the Arts Council N.I. The report was endorsed by Council in February 1998; its recommendations were agreed by both councils.

The 8 recommendations were:

- That Belfast City Council and the Arts Council establish formal mechanisms to ensure a strategic approach in the support of the arts product in the City.
- That Belfast City Council (BCC) and the Arts Council (ACNI) facilitate formally constituted, regular meetings of a liaison group consisting of representatives of the City's principal venues and promoters.
- That the Ulster Hall and the Group Theatre are totally refurbished.
- That a major, city centre arts centre for Belfast is developed, either through the amalgamation of the Crescent Arts Centre and the Old Museum Arts Centre (OMAL), or by another means.
- That the Arts Theatre is funded as a receiving house until such times as plans to develop a middle-scale performance space by other organisations are able to be fully appraised.
- That the Lyric Theatre upgrade the facilities for audiences and performers.
- That Belfast City Council and the Arts Council revisit the concept of a city-wide arts marketing service.
- That the proposal to establish a Mobile Theatre Unit be supported, subject to the outcome of the economic appraisal.

BCC and ACNI were keen to move forward with these proposals and the next years were to see major changes in the cultural sector in Belfast. The establishment of a Department for Cultural Arts and Leisure, with a Minister, added weight to arguments about the role of culture in regeneration. The Council in 2000 initiated and backed a bid for Belfast to become European City of Culture, which also further galvanised the debate. In this period also, Laganside became responsible for the area now known as Cathedral Quarter and designated this as a cultural area.

As a direct result of Southwood, the Council took a number of actions. In relation to performing arts venues the Arts Sub-Committee included the refurbishment of the Ulster Hall, a major city centre arts venue and the upgrade of the Lyric in its 1998-2001 Arts Strategy agreed in February 1998. A Southwood Group was established between BCC and ACNI with both officers and Members participating, which met from 1998 to 2002. An arts venue promoters group was also established. BCC also commissioned an economic appraisal by BDO Stoy Hayward into the development of a city centre arts centre in Belfast – its conclusion endorsed by the Arts Sub-Committee in April 1999 was that the preferred option was to site it at Talbot Street (Laganside to provide space) and to have it managed by an amalgamation of the Crescent Arts Centre and the Old Museum Arts Centre, or some other arrangement.

In addition, the Client Services Committee agreed in principle in November 1999 to the refurbishment of the Ulster Hall. Alongside this process the Grand Opera House was also seeking refurbishment. What was essentially lacking from the process though was major resourcing to undertake in particular the physical infrastructure projects outlined in Southwood. Both ACNI and BCC lacked large capital resources to support these. The failure of the Capital of Culture Bid in 2004 underlined the need to address this issue, as lack of cultural infrastructure was cited as a main reason for the failure. As a result, DCAL worked to establish capital funding for new infrastructure and published its own position paper in November 2005 in which it included the Lyric, the Grand Opera House, the Ulster Hall, OMAC/City Centre Arts Venue, Crescent Arts Centre as well as the Black Box, as strategic projects. Since then they have worked with ACNI, DSD and ourselves to bring these projects to fruition.

Moving forward in relation to performing arts infrastructure as outlined by Southwood – the Ulster Hall is now being refurbished; the Lyric is poised to move forward and the City Centre arts venue is to be completed by OMAC, both supported by DCAL and ACNI. In addition, the Grand Opera House recently completed its refurbishment and the Crescent Arts Centre is in the final planning stage to go forward.

In this context, BCC considered again its commitment to providing support to cultural infrastructure. Under its Integrated Cultural Strategy launched in June 2007, the Council committed itself to the development of creative and cultural means to promote physical regeneration in the City and support sustainable development of cultural venues in the City.

Key Issues

- MAC have submitted an application seeking support of £552,906 from BCC towards the capital build of the new project based at St Anne's Square in the Cathedral Quarter. A summary of their application is attached and representatives of MAC will be in attendance to present their proposal.
- The total cost of the MAC is over £17m with the following breakdown of support provided:

| Capital Costs breakdown | £ |
|--|---------------------|
| Total Project Cost | 17, 771, 627 |
| | |
| Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure | 10,760, 000 |
| Arts Council of Northern Ireland Lottery | 4, 250, 000 |
| Laganside / DSD | 550,000 |
| | |
| Shortfall | 2,211,627 |
| Requested BCC support (25% of shortfall) | 552, 906 |
| OMAC fundraising to date | 630, 000 |
| Remaining fundraising target | 1, 028, 721 |

- MAC require a commitment of 95% of the total project costs before entering into a contract with the project's preferred building contractor to allow construction to begin in April 2009. The sum requested from BCC will permit the project to reach close to this limit and supports a number of other active applications to trusts and foundations.
- The MAC is designed to be a new landmark culture venue in the Cathedral Quarter. The 5500 sq metre project will contain:
 - 1000 sq metres of state-of-the-art visual arts exhibition space
 - two fully flexible theatre spaces – a mid-scale space for 350 – 550 people and a studio of 120 people
 - a range of studio, rehearsal and workshop rooms
 - associated meeting & function rooms plus commercial facilities

- The MAC is forecast to deliver 64,000 audience members per annum for live events; 55,000 for visual art and 20,000 for community engagement.
- The funding offered to the Lyric was part of the £3m identified for the Cultural Legacy Fund. The equation selected by Committee on which to base an allocation for the Lyric was approximately 25% of the private sector fund-raising target.
- The proposed location of the MAC in Cathedral Quarter has additional regenerative impact to an area that is now beginning to create critical mass in terms of regeneration with the current St Anne's development and the proposed UU campus.
- MAC will create numerous opportunities through training and youth programmes for entry into creative industries, a sector now employing 1.1m people according to the Department of Culture, Sports and Media's sources.
- Members will recall that in principle, the agreement was given to fund the MAC at the Dec 07 Policy & Resources Committee in conjunction with a decision to provide £1.25m to the Lyric Theatre for its capital redevelopment given both projects met previously agreed criteria for the City Investment Strategy.

MAC would welcome BCC participation on its Project Board and other governance structures.

Resource Implications

Financial Services have provided the following update on CIF resourcing:

FUND BALANCE PROGRESS

| | £m |
|---|---------------------|
| Reserves 2007 | 1.0 |
| Rental Windfall 2007 | 1.075 |
| Balance as at 31.03.2008 | <u>2.075</u> |
| | |
| Boucher Road Receipt | 1.429 |
| Balance as at 26.02.2009 | <u>3.504</u> |
| | |
| Planned Contribution from Reserves 2008 | 1.0 |
| Forecast position as at 31.03.2009 | <u><u>4.504</u></u> |

The Committee agreed to approve funding in the sum of £552,906 for the Museum Arts Centre, subject to the necessary legal agreements being drawn up by the Director of Legal Services.

Revenue Budget 2008/09 Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st November, it had been advised that the forecasted year end budget would result in an overspend by the Council of £850,000. At its meeting on 12th December, it had been advised further that, through various cost-cutting measures, the forecasted overspend had been reduced to £400,000.

The Director of Corporate Services reported that, based on figures up until the end of December, 2008, the year end outturn for 2008/09 was forecasted to be an overspend of £271,000. He pointed out that the key drivers for the overspend continued to be the loss of external and investment income and inflationary pressures on utility costs. He reassured Members that income and expenditure was being monitored on a continuous basis and officers were working hard to identify more short-term cost reductions to reduce further the potential overspend. Any material changes to the forecast would be reported to the Members at the earliest possible opportunity and a further update would be submitted to the Committee in April, after the end of the financial year.

Noted.

Review of Domestic Rating: A Consultation Report

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

As Members are aware one of the first decisions taken by the Executive following the return of devolution was to undertake a comprehensive review of the domestic rating system which had been previously introduced by direct rule Ministers. The aim of this review was to make the rating system more acceptable and more responsive to local people’s needs. A number of changes have already been introduced as part of the Review process including a new lone pensioner allowance (which provides a 20% discount for those aged 70 and over living alone - approximately 20,000 applications and £2.5m have been awarded to date under this scheme) and an increase in the savings limit for pensioners under the rate relief scheme (from £16,000 to £50,000)

As part of this ongoing review the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) issued a series of consultation documents last year on a number of key policy areas –

- 1. the rating of empty homes**
- 2. reducing the maximum capital value to £400,000**
- 3. the proposed introduction of a rates deferment scheme for home owning pensioners**
- 4. improving data sharing powers to facilitate increased rate relief uptake**
- 5. the introduction of green rebates.**

Members will recall that the Council agreed and submitted corporate responses to the DFP on each of these consultations last year.

The DFP has now published a final report which summarises the responses received in relation to these consultations and outlines the decisions of the Finance Minister, Nigel Dodds, on the detail of the various measures and the next steps in the reform process. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on this report.

In summary the high level decisions taken in relation to these policy rating areas are that –

- the rating of empty homes will be introduced at 100% liability, with no phasing or initial exemption period**
- it is intended to reduce the maximum capital value to £400,000 along with compensating arrangements for district councils in 2009/10 and 2010/11, subject to Assembly and Executive approval of the necessary legislation**
- a rates deferment scheme for home owning pensioners will be introduced. This will be subject to certain criteria being met, including the owner occupier being aged 60 or over and there being certain levels of equity in their property**
- green rebates for loft and cavity wall insulation will be introduced, in addition to a low and zero carbon rate rebate for two and five years respectively**
- improved data sharing powers will be introduced.**

Further detail on the main decisions taken in relation to these rating policy areas is set out below. Members are asked to note that the final policy positions adopted by the Executive in relation to these rating policy areas are mostly consistent with the responses submitted by the Council. There are a number of areas where the final policy position adopted by the Executive differs from the views expressed by the Council and these are highlighted for Members information in this report. Further information on the Executive Review of Rating Reform is available at www.ratingreviewni.gov.uk.

Key Issues

Rating of empty homes – Final policy position

- The liable person will be the person entitled to possession of the property, which usually means the owner.
- Rates on empty homes will be levied at 100%.
- The rating of empty homes will not be introduced on a phased basis.
- There will be no general initial exemption period. A 12 month exemption period will, however, apply to new property developments.
- Similar to the non-domestic sector, completion notices will be available to determine when rates liability begins for new empty homes.
- Certain properties will be excluded from the rating of empty homes, including where occupation is legally prohibited or by government action, where a person is receiving care, the property is empty due to imprisonment or the owner's death (probate) and for properties below a capital value of £20,000.
- Properties in the rented sector, for which owners have agreed to pay rates, will be excluded from the standard rating of empty homes policy.
- The maximum capital value and transitional relief (when in place) will apply to empty homes.
- Occupation based allowances and reliefs (disabled persons allowance, housing benefit, rate relief, relief for those in full time education and training and young people leaving care and lone pensioner allowance) will not apply where rates are levied on empty properties.

- The valuation allowance for farmhouses will not be awarded on empty property, due to occupancy conditions.
- The 50% exemption on religious Ministers' houses will apply when the property is empty, subject to it being used for pastoral duties when next in use.
- New powers will be provided that would allow avoidance measures to be introduced in the future if necessary.

The final policy position adopted by the Executive in relation to the *rating of empty homes reflects the views expressed by the Council in its consultation response.*

Reduction in the maximum capital value – Final policy position

- The maximum capital value is to be reduced from £500,000 to £400,000. Assembly approval of the necessary subordinate legislation will be required.
- Subject to the Executive signing off the Rates (Amendment) Bill the Assembly will be asked to approve legislation that will allow compensating payments to be provided to district councils in respect of the 2009/10 and 2010/11 rating years. This will apply to the reduction from £500,000 to £400,000. It is intended that it will be levied at 100% and 50% in the respective years.
- Retrospective relief will not be provided to district councils in relation to the introduction of the £500,000 maximum capital value in April 2007.

The final decisions adopted by the Executive in relation to the reduction in the maximum capital reflects the views expressed by the Council in its response to this consultation

Deferment scheme for home owning pensioners – Final policy position

- Deferment is voluntary and will be provided at the department's discretion.
- Deferment will only apply to a property owned and occupied by an applicant aged 60 or over, subsequently increasing in line with the minimum pensionable age.
- The department will have the discretion to enter into a deferment agreement with both the eligible person and a spouse/partner who also owns and occupies the property.

- Deferment will be limited to a person's main home. It will not be permitted on second homes or empty homes (with limited exceptions for residential care/medical treatment).
- There must be a minimum 40% equity in the property, with deferred rates not exceeding 80% of the property's equity.
- The deferred debt (including rates, interest and any fees) will take the form of a statutory charge on the property.
- Interest will be levied at the Bank of England base rate (currently 2%) minus 1%, calculated on a compound basis. The department will reserve the power to alter this or charge a minimum interest rate.
- Applicants will be strongly recommended, but not required, to have received independent financial advice, prior to entering into a deferment agreement.
- The deferred debt will be due and owing on the sale or transfer of the property, death of the agreement holder (unless a joint agreement has been entered into with a spouse or partner), eligibility conditions no longer being met or the terms of the agreement having been breached by the deferree.
- Repayment flexibility could be provided for in very limited circumstances, where immediate repayment would lead to exceptional hardship.
- Rates cannot be deferred on properties with a capital value below £50,000 (£300 rate bill). Partial deferment of rates will not be permitted. An exception may be made in the first year of the scheme operating.
- The onus will be on applicants to verify property title (ownership) and other necessary information, bearing any associated charges.
- An annual statement will be provided to participants showing the deferred debt, interest levels and any fees.
- Those aggrieved by a decision of the department not to enter a deferment agreement or terminate an agreement may ask for the decision to be reviewed.

The final policy position adopted by the Executive in relation to the deferment scheme for home owning pensioners reflects the majority of the views expressed by the Council in its consultation submission. However the Council had recommended in its submission on this area that the age of eligibility for the scheme should be set at 65 and not 60 as has been agreed by the Executive.

Data sharing – Final policy position

- New legislative powers will be introduced to allow the main delivery agencies to share information for the purposes of targeting likely recipients of the various rating reliefs and assessing housing benefit claims for owner occupiers.
- All staff involved should be made aware of and adhere to the departmental data sharing policy statement and action plan.
- Relevant staff should receive the necessary training and receive pro-active support from dedicated managers.
- Only authorised staff should have access to the data and there will be a requirement to adhere to the data protection principles and protocols.
- The Data Controller should be clearly identified.
- A transparent audit trail needs to be established.
- Data handling procedures will be subject to periodic independent review.
- Other methods of improving take-up, such as increased telephony and simplification of the application process, will be taken forward in tandem with enhanced data sharing.

The final decisions adopted by the Executive in relation to green rebates reflects the views expressed by the Council in its response to this consultation

Green rebates – Final policy position

- The rebate scheme will be funded centrally and will be administered as a stand alone energy efficiency scheme by the Energy Savings Trust.
- The rebate will be available to owner occupiers who carry out loft and cavity wall insulation.
- An enabling power will be taken in the primary legislation to allow the rebate scheme to be extended to the social sector should circumstances change and this be required.
- The level of the rebate is likely to be around £200.
- A five year rates exemption will be introduced for the first residents of zero carbon homes.

- The new definition to emerge from the UK Government's consultation on 'the definition of Zero Carbon' will be used.
- A two year rates exemption will be introduced for the first residents of low-carbon homes.
- Low-carbon homes will be defined as achieving level four or greater, but less than level six, of the code for sustainable homes.

The final decisions adopted by the Executive in relation green rebates reflects the views expressed by the Council in its response to this consultation

Update on other rating issues

The 'Review of Domestic Rating' report also gives a brief update on a number of other key rating issues where work has been ongoing.

Take up of rate relief

- Following the Executive's review of the domestic rating system in 2007 Help the Aged and Age Concern were commissioned to carry out a study to examine why the take-up of rates relief among older people is so low and what could be done to improve this. The subsequent report on this study (Access to Benefits for Older People) contained recommendations that go beyond rate relief take-up and are of relevance for other parts of Government involved in the delivery of benefits. An inter-departmental group has been established to take forward these recommendations.

Evaluation of the relief scheme for those in full-time education etc.

- A rate relief scheme for those in full time education and training, young people leaving care and persons under the age of 18 was introduced in April 2007 by direct rule ministers. This scheme attracted much criticism and as a result the Executive agreed that this scheme should be evaluated. FGS McClure Watters were engaged to carry out this evaluation and the Minister is currently considering the findings of their report with a view to bringing forward recommendations to the Executive in early 2009.

Derelict land tax

- Following the Executive's review of domestic rating in 2007 it was proposed to examine the scope for the introduction of a new, ongoing tax on previously developed but now derelict land in order to act as a disincentive to excess land banking. The reports highlights that the continued adjustment in the local housing market has clearly impacted on the rationale for such a tax at this time. In addition given the difficult conditions currently being faced by the development and house building sectors the report concludes that it does not appear to be the right time to be considering the imposition of a further tax on land holdings.

Executive's response to the economic downturn – commercial rates

- As part of the Executive's response to the economic downturn the Finance Minister announced recently that he intends to introduce further changes to the rating system by asking the Assembly to introduce a targeted small business rate relief scheme. This would be funded centrally and not by charging other ratepayers more. This should be available in April 2010 at the earliest subject to Assembly approval.

Next Steps

The necessary legislation to give effect to these policy decisions outlined above in relation to the rating of empty homes, reducing the maximum capital value, the rates deferment scheme for home owning pensioners, green rebates and improved data sharing will now be drafted and brought forward to the Executive and Assembly for approval. It is intended that the legislation to give effect to the reduction in the maximum capital value will be introduced by April 2009, subject to Assembly approval. It is envisaged that the necessary primary and subordinate legislation required for all of the other policy decisions will be drafted during 2009 and introduced by 2010. It should be noted however that the Finance Minister has also stated that whilst he intends to introduce vacant rating in April 2010 he will retain the flexibility to take account of the overriding economic position to this closer to the time and will review this decision nearer the time if necessary.

Decision required

Members are asked to note the contents of this report for their information."

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report and noted also that the Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate Services would keep Members updated in connection with any developments around these areas.

Authority to Seek Tenders - City Matters

The Committee granted authority for the commencement of a tendering exercise and delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, to accept the most advantageous tender in respect of a one year contract for the printing of six editions of the City Matters publication from June, 2009 till June, 2010, with the option to extend the contract for a further two years.

Alleygates at Various Locations - Term Contract

The Committee agreed to defer for one month consideration of a report in relation to a term contract for alleygating schemes at various locations throughout the City.

Transition Committee Business

Role and Responsibilities of the Transition Committee

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the role and responsibilities of the Transition Committee:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Committee had agreed, at its meeting on 20th February 2009, that with effect from March 2009, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (SP&R) would meet formally as the Council’s RPA Transition Committee to discuss transitional related matters.**
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to set out the evolving role and responsibilities of the Council’s Transition Committee and its legal status; governance and management arrangements; anticipated initial programme of work and associated timeline.**

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 The primary role of the Transition Committee will be to provide overall political direction and to take the necessary decisions to ensure a coherent and co-ordinated approach is taken by the Council in moving forward in the RPA transition (implementation) process.**
- 2.2 Guidance issued by the Environment Minister Sammy Wilson, MLA in regards to the establishment of Transition Committees and the associated Terms of Reference and governance arrangements has been circulated for the information of the Members.**

- 2.3 It is clear that Belfast stands in a different position in relation to the RPA transition process from the other 25 councils, since all the other councils are to be abolished and replaced by 10 new councils. In contrast, Belfast is assimilating relatively small geographical areas of Castlereagh and Lisburn within its boundary. Because the other 25 Councils are merging, they will form into clusters to create Transition Committees, made up of elected members from constituent councils, for the purposes of managing the transition and convergence process. Belfast City Council will manage its own transition process through the SP&R Committee and engage with the adjacent Transition Committee for Lisburn and Castlereagh on relevant transitional issues.**
- 2.4 Whilst in many respects the circumstances for Belfast City Council are somewhat different from those of the other Councils, the broad principles set out within the attached Guidance will be applied by the Council as they complement existing good governance practices applied by it.**
- 2.5 In terms of the overall programme of work to be taken forward by the Transition Committee this will evolve on an incremental basis and will grow in its intensity and scope as we move into the implementation phase of the RPA process.**
- 2.6 Also circulated for the Members' information is a briefing paper on the local government reform implementation plan prepared for the consideration of the RPA Regional Transition Coordination Group. The paper provides a progress update and sets out the key activities and milestones in the process.**
- 2.7 In order to ensure appropriate transparency in the Council's decision making process in regards to RPA transition, it will be important that a distinction is made between the business to be discussed by the RPA Transition Committee and the normal business of the SP&R Committee.**
- 2.8 Accordingly, with effect from April 2009, it is proposed that as necessary the first of the two SP&R monthly Committee meetings will, in effect, be divided into two separate parts. The first part of the meeting will be the SP&R Committee meeting as the Transition Committee and any items of business of a transitional nature will be captured and minuted under a transition committee heading. For the purposes of transparency and audit these minutes would be forwarded to the Strategic Leadership Board for information only.**

- 2.9 Once transition related business has been concluded, the SP&R Committee will continue its ordinary business on a separate agenda. In this way the Transition Committee business can be readily identified and kept separate from the ordinary business of the Committee. As the membership of the SP&R Committee and the Transition Committee is coterminous, this could be achieved with no disruption to business.
- 2.10 As time goes on, it might be that the amount of business which the Transition Committee will be required to conduct will be such that it will be necessary for the whole of the first of the two meetings to be dedicated to that Committee with all of the rest of the business being dealt with at the SP&R meeting on the 3rd Friday of the month. Clearly there will be a need for some flexibility to be built into this process to ensure that important issues can be addressed in a timely matter as they emerge.
- 2.11 If the Committee were minded to accept this proposal it would provide the greatest flexibility in ordering the business of the SP&R and Transition Committee over the next 12 months.

Legal Status of Transition Committees

- 2.12 Whilst the Transition Committee will operate on a voluntary basis initially, its role will evolve over the coming months as it starts to lay the foundations in preparation for the new Council post May 2011. The Department of the Environment intends to make enabling provisions for statutory Transition Committees in the Local Government (Finance) Bill, with a planned operative date of no later than April 2010.
- 2.13 In the interim period the Transition Committees for the grouping councils (excluding Belfast) are to be formed on the basis of a Joint Committee using existing provisions of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972. These Transition Committees will have a statutory basis for accountable decisions within the context of guidance issued by the DoE.
- 2.14 Given the fact that the Environment Minister has already confirmed that the SP&R would be the Council's Transition Committee and in anticipation of the guidance to be issued by the Department, it is recommended for Members' consideration that delegated authority be sought for the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) to take decisions on transitional related matters within the context of the guidance to be provided by the DoE.

**Appointment of the Chair and Deputy Chair
of Transition Committee**

- 2.15 It is recommended that, for the purposes of continuity, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the SP&R, who are appointed on the basis of proportionality using D'Hondt, are the respective Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council's Transition Committee.

Members' Remuneration

- 2.16 Members will be aware that an additional allowance of **£2,700 per annum** (pro rata for 2008/2009) is to be allocated to Members of the Council's Transition Committee. This will be grant funded by the Department of the Environment (DoE) and payments will be allocated within the Council on the same basis as the payment of Special Responsibility allowances.
- 2.17 Given the fact that the SP&R Committee has met over the last number of months to discuss RPA matters under the auspices of its role as the Council's Transition Committee, a request has been submitted to the DoE seeking agreement that the commencement date of the Council's Transition Committee be January 2009 and that the payment of Members' allowances would be effective from that date. If approved, this would mean that each Member would be entitled to £675 outstanding allowance for the period 1st January – 31st March 2009.

3.0 Resource Implications

- 3.1 Whilst Members of the Council's Transition Committee will be paid £2,700 annual allowance (pro-rata), this will be grant funded from the Department of Environment and will have no financial implications for the Council.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) agree that those items of Committee business of a transitional nature be minuted accordingly and forwarded to the Strategic Leadership Board for information;
- b) agree that, as required, SP&R would meet under the auspices of its role as Transition Committee at the first of the two SP&R monthly Committee meetings and that transitional business would be separated from normal SP&R business (refer to sections 2.8 to 2.10 above);

- c) agree that the Chair and Deputy Chair of SP&R be appointed as the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council's Transition Committee; and
- d) agree that delegated authority be sought for the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. SP&R) to take decisions on transitional related matters within the context of the guidance to be issued by the DoE."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Review of Public Administration - Reform of Local Government Communication Seminar

The Committee was advised that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, in conjunction with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, had organised a seminar entitled the "Reform of Local Government Communication" to be held in the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick on 27th March from 10.15 a.m. till 12.45 p.m. The purpose of the event would be to provide attendees with an update on the Review of Public Administration process and the work which had been undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers to explore potential future service delivery options for local government. There would be no fee associated with attendance at the event.

The Committee approved the attendance at the seminar of any Member of the Council who so wished, together with the Chief Executive and the Director of Core Improvement (or their nominees).

Modernisation and Improvement

Working Towards a Safer City Agenda

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Safer City Agenda:

"Relevant Background Information

Community safety is one of the main concerns of the people of Belfast and hence is a key element of the *Supporting People and Communities* theme of the Council's Corporate Plan.

Members will be aware that the Council's contribution to a Safer City is achieved through:

- ***The Community Safety Partnership***
The Council takes the lead role in supporting the Belfast Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which brings together representatives from various agencies and sectors to work collectively on the delivery of programmes to help make communities safer. Each of the political parties is represented. The CSP has recently agreed a Safer Belfast Plan for 2009–2011, which prioritises four main themes: tackling anti-social behaviour; reducing alcohol fuelled violent crime; dealing with hate crime; and

to help Belfast feel safer. The Council receives funding from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) on behalf of the CSP of £380,000 for programme work and £123,000 for staff per year (secured until end of March 2011). Partner agencies also make some contributions to particular programmes.

- **The District Policing Partnership**
The Council is also responsible for leading and administering the District Policing Partnership (DPP) which consists of a Principal DPP and four geographically based sub groups. The DPP, which is made up of both Elected and Independent Members, has statutory responsibility for community engagement on policing issues, gaining the co-operation of the public with the police in preventing crime and in monitoring the performance of the police against the targets included in the Annual and Local Policing Plans. The Northern Ireland Policing Board provides for 75% of approved expenditure incurred by the DPP which consists mostly of Members' Allowances and staff salaries. There is also provision for the advertising and holding of a significant number of public consultation meetings and public meetings to monitor police performance and a small amount to support local initiatives.. In the 2008/09 financial year, the total budget for the DPP is £511,000 of which the Council contributes £128,000.
- **Community Safety Team**
A Community Safety Team to support the CSP and also to oversee the delivery of a number of programmes and projects is currently located within the Environmental Health Service. This team has recently been reviewed and the new structure will create a geographic focus as well as support for key projects. There will be 4 Community Safety Co-ordinators and 4 Anti-social Behaviour Officers with responsibility for the North, South East and West of the City respectively. There will also be project officers responsible for wardens services, alleygating, alcohol misuse, hate crime etc. Both the Roaming and Holyland wardens are also employed within that team, although this service is also under review.
- **ASB Co-ordinator – Parks and Leisure**
The ASB Co-ordinator in Parks and Leisure was originally employed on a pilot basis to develop community based solutions to anti-social behaviour in nine parks and leisure sites. This post also supports the wider range of activities undertaken in the Parks and Leisure Department.

An evaluation of the pilot strongly endorsed the methodology which has seen a 43% drop in ASB in the pilot sites. The Parks and Leisure Committee at its December 2008 meeting agreed to roll out the approach to other sites and to recruit the post of anti-social behaviour officer on a permanent basis to support this.

- *Other Council Services*
Many of the Council services carry out activities which improve community safety. This includes leisure and community centres providing diversionary activities, park rangers keeping their parks safe, cleansing graffiti squads, the night time noise service and many of the Good Relations activities, particularly around interfaces and bonfire management.

Cross Council Working

As a Safer Belfast is now one of the Council's themes under the Corporate Plan, a greater focus has been placed on achieving a more integrated approach. The Chief Executive has taken a lead role in driving this theme. An internal Safer City Group has been established and a 'One – Council Safer City Plan' produced which aims to make better use of resources, ensure joined up communication and find innovative ways of responding to emerging problems.

CSP and DPP Review

The Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice is currently undertaking a review of the future for CSPs and DPPs with a view to ultimately achieving an integrated partnership. However it is now unlikely that any radical changes will be made before devolution of these powers. Therefore in the meantime a consultation document is likely to call for better joining up of the two partnerships at a local level.

Community Engagement

There are a plethora of community engagement structures and process which have a role in developing a safer city. These include DPP Sub Groups (meetings in Public), Partners and Communities Together (PACTs), Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, Area Boards, Community Empowerment Partnerships and the Council's emerging approach to Local Area Working.

In addition, the West Belfast Community Safety Forum has been set up in the West of the city with the aim of improving the engagement of the community with the statutory sector and with the criminal justice agencies in particular. At a recent meeting involving Minister Goggins and a joint delegation from the DPP and CSP, the

Minister acknowledged that there was a need to support communities in other areas of the city too, but that the approach in each area is likely to be different. He further challenged the delegation to consider what might be appropriate in other areas, but was non committal about any additional financial support.

Key Issues

Members through various Committees and through the Council itself have expressed the view that there is too much duplication of effort and confusion created by the way we currently deliver the safer city agenda and have called for a much more integrated approach.

Concerns have also been raised in respect of the myriad of community engagement structures and processes and there is a clear need to rationalise this. Recent developments in terms of the establishment of the West Belfast Community Safety Forum and the PSNI led roll out of PACTs (Partners and Communities Together) have escalated discussions on community engagement processes.

In addition, at a recent meeting involving Minister Goggins and a joint delegation from the DPP and CSP, the Minister invited Council Members to consider how, in the short to medium term, CSPs and DPPs could work more closely together.

There is clearly a need for political leadership on these issues. To start this process, it is proposed that a safer city workshop should be held in the Lord Mayor's Parlour, Clarendon Dock on Thursday 25th March from 4.30pm to 7.00pm to which all Members have received an invitation. The workshop will be followed by dinner. The purpose of the workshop will be to:

- Gain a consistent understanding of the current work being undertaken on safer city, the roles of the CSP and DPP and developments that are taking place such as the review of CSPs / DPPs, proposals for PACTs, etc;
- Develop a clear view on what additional measures are needed to ensure better integration of service delivery internally within the Council;
- Develop a consistent understanding of the current and developing community engagement structures and processes and consider if it is possible for the Council to work across these more effectively;

- Consider the possibilities for better aligning the work of the CSP and DPP in the short to medium term;
- Agree how Members should be involved in taking proposals and actions forward and further shaping the safer city agenda.

The NIO and PSNI have been invited to give an input to the workshop.

A more detailed discussion document, which includes a summary of the meeting with Minister Goggins, has been circulated for the information of the Members.

Resource Implications

Financial

The cost of the workshop is estimated in the region of £1,500.

No other costs are evident at this stage.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the issues which need further debate and discussion and agree to extend an invitation to all Members to attend the safer city workshop on 25th March to begin this process.

Key to Abbreviations

CSP – Community Safety Partnership
DPP – District Policing partnership
NIO – Northern Ireland Office
PSNI – Police Service of Northern Ireland
PACT – Partners and Communities Together
ASB – Anti-Social Behaviour”

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to the holding of the Safer City Workshop during April.

Democratic Services and Governance

Review of Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland: Revised Recommendations

The Committee was reminded that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner had on 18th September released his recommendations on the new Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland. He had proposed eleven Council areas,

with sixty Wards and Councillors in Belfast and a total of forty in each of the remaining Council areas. The Commissioner had recommended that the Boundary of the Belfast City Council Local Government District should reflect the City's natural setting within the surrounding hills, a number of landscape features and several major roads. He had proposed that:

- 9 Localities - Gilnahirk, Tullycarnet, Braniel, Castlereagh, Merok, Cregagh, Wynchurch, Glencregagh and Belvoir - be transferred from the current Castlereagh Borough Council area into Belfast;
- 6 Localities - Colin Glen, Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook, Kilwee and Dunmurry – be transferred from the existing Lisburn City Council area into Belfast; and
- 1 small area of housing at Knocknagoney be transferred from the existing North Down Borough Council area to Belfast.

The Committee, at its meeting on 24th October, had agreed that the responses to the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations be left to the individual Political Parties. However, subsequent to that meeting Council officers had reviewed the written submissions which had been made by Castlereagh, Lisburn and North Down Councils and had spoken to the Party Groups within the Council to seek approval for the Council to make representations at the public hearing in relation to those submissions. All the Party Groups had agreed that it would be appropriate for the Council to be represented at the hearing and make a submission which highlighted the need for Belfast to retain a sufficient rate base to meet the needs of its citizens in terms of improvements in services and facilities and to rebut some of the submissions of the other Councils by reference to the legislative parameters within which the Commissioner should make his decision.

Following the consultation period, the Commissioner had, on 27th February, issued Revised Recommendations. The Commissioner had proposed to make no change in Belfast to the number of Wards or the names of Wards to those detailed in the Provisional Recommendations. However, he had made a small revision to the district boundary and the boundaries of Wards as set out below:

District Boundary

There would be an adjustment of the boundary between Belfast and Lisburn City and Castlereagh at Tullycarnet to reflect recent new developments on the ground.

Boundaries of Wards

- The Beechmount, Clonard and Falls Wards had been reconfigured and the proposed changes had been based on readily identifiable boundaries;
- A number of changes had been made to the Falls Park, Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy Wards. The boundary between Ballymurphy and Falls Park would be the Whiterock Road rather than the Blackstaff River. To achieve electoral equality, a compensatory adjustment was required between Turf Lodge and Ballymurphy;

- The Ladybrook, Stewartstown, Shaw's Road and Andersonstown Wards had been changed to allow for more identifiable boundaries; and
- A number of houses would be transferred from the Forthriver Ward to the Ballygomartin Ward using the line of the river as the new boundary. This would require some compensatory alterations to the boundary of Forthriver with the Woodvale and Ligoniel Wards.

A summary of the revised recommendations is so far as they related to Belfast, together with a report listing the streets in the City which are included in any particular Ward, would be made available to all Members of the Council in due course.

Next Stages

- The publication of the report had commenced a consultation period inviting representations on the Revised Recommendations by Thursday, 9th April, 2009;
- When the Commissioner had decided on his final recommendations, he would submit a final report to the Department of the Environment by 30th June, 2009; and
- As soon as possible after the Commissioner submitted his final report, the Department of the Environment would lay the report before the Assembly, together with a draft Order giving effect to the recommendations with or without modifications.

The Committee agreed that, in line with its previous decisions in relation to the Review of Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland, responses to the Commissioner's Revised Recommendations be left to the individual Political Parties.

Committee Meeting - 5th June, 2009

The Committee was reminded that the European Elections were scheduled to take place in June. The timetable for the Poll and Count was as follows:

- Thursday, 1st June - Polling day
- Friday, 5th June – Verification of Ballot Papers
- Monday, 8th June – Counting of Ballot Papers

The Members were reminded also that the Committee now held two meetings per month and the first meeting in June was scheduled to be held on 5th June, which clashed with the date for the verification of the Ballot Papers.

It was recognised that many of the Members would be involved in assisting their Party's nominated candidates in the Election through canvassing, acting as Election Agents and attending the verification and counting of the Ballot Papers and therefore might not be available to attend the Committee meeting on 5th June. Given the time

commitment of Members, it was recommended that the aforementioned meeting be cancelled. It was pointed out that there were meetings of the Committee scheduled to be held on 22nd May and 19th June and that those should be sufficient to deal with any Committee business during that period.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Election Protocol

The Committee was advised that the Council, at its meeting on 1st November, 2004, had agreed an Election Protocol which provided guidance for Members and staff on issues which might arise during the period before an election. Whilst it related mainly to the immediate run-up period, that is, between the official Notice of Election and the Poll, it stated *“caution also needs to be exercised in relation to some activities, such as the organisation of Council events involving publicity, just outside the run-up period particularly where the likely impacts would extend into the sensitive election period”*. Members would be aware that there was a European Parliamentary Election due to be held shortly. The Notice of Election would be published on 27th April and the Committee and Members’ Services Section had advised the Chief Officers as indicated in the Protocol, which had been re-issued to Departments in advance of the official Election period so that it could be taken into account when planning for that period.

The Committee noted the contents of the Election Protocol.

**Requests for the Use of the City Hall
and the Provision of Civic Hospitality**

The Committee was informed 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 |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Michael Conlon Foundation | The Michael Conlon Award for Nursing 7 th May, 2009 Approximately 70 attending | The provision of hospitality in the form a tea, coffee and soft drinks Reception | The aim of this event is to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of those in the Nursing profession and carers and to recognise those who have gone beyond the call of duty. This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objectives of Providing Civic Leadership and Improving the Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations. | The provision of hospitality in the form of tea, coffee and soft drinks Approximate cost £210 |

| Organisation/ Body | Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests | Request | Comments | Recommendation |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| George Best Belfast City Airport Forum | Dinner to mark the Annual Conference of the United Kingdom Airport Consultative Committees 27 th May, 2009 Approximately 80 attending | The provision of hospitality in the form of a dinner | The Airport Forum is responsible for discussing issues which relate to the development and operation of the airport. Belfast City Council has close links with the George Best Belfast City Airport and is represented on the Airport Forum. This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Providing Civic Leadership. | The provision of hospitality in the form of a dinner. Approximate cost £2,800 |
| Irish Children's Summer Programme | 25 th Anniversary of the Irish Children's Summer Programme 21 st November, 2009 (evening) Approximately 500 Attending | The provision of Hospitality in the form of a drinks reception | The Irish Children's Summer Programme facilitates the development of both Catholic and Protestant children and young people in terms of their social interaction, leadership skills and civic pride. This event will celebrate the 25 th Anniversary of the Programme and will recognise the work undertaken in developing our children and young people. The event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objectives of Providing Civic Leadership, Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations and Promoting Good Relations. | The provision of a drinks reception in the form of wine and soft drinks Approximate cost £2,000 |

| Organisation/ Body | Event/Date – Number of Delegates/Guests | Request | Comments | Recommendation |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme | Silver Award Presentation 4 th December, 2009 (evening) Approximately 500 Attending | Use of City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a Finger Buffet Reception | These awards aim to recognise the development of citizenship, challenging young people to give service to others and to develop personal skills and abilities. The event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objectives of Providing Civic Leadership and Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations. | Use of City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a Finger Buffet Reception Approximate cost £5,000 |
| Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland | Queen's Award Ceremony 14th May, 2010 (evening) Approximately 450 Attending | Use of City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-event Drinks Reception | This event will recognise those girls who have attained the Queen's Award. The Award is presented to girls who have been involved actively in their communities and who have demonstrated their initiative in completing tasks and developing their educational skills. The ceremony meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objectives of Providing Civic Leadership and Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations. | Use of City Hall and the provision of Hospitality in the form of soft drinks Approximate cost £1,800 |
| Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology | 32nd International Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Gala Dinner 22nd June, 2010 (evening) Approximately 450 attending | The use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in the form of a pre-dinner drinks reception | It is estimated that 1400 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city. | Provision of a drinks reception in the form of wines and soft drinks Approximate cost £1,800 |

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Budget and Transformation Panel –
Terms of Reference**

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the terms of reference for the Budget and Transformation Panel:

“Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to recommend terms of reference for the Budget and Transformation Panel.

Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that it was agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 6 February 2009 to establish a Budget and Transformation Panel. The terms of reference set out the objectives of the Panel, its deliverables, ways of working, governance arrangements and programme of work.

Terms of Reference for the Budget and Transformation Panel

Overall Objective

The overall objective of the Budget and Transformation Panel is to provide political leadership and oversight of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda and the Council's finances in general.

Detailed Objectives

1. To provide political support in terms of party groupings and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the delivery of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda.
2. To scrutinise the alignment of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda to corporate priorities.
3. To support the development and implementation of the Council's efficiency and transformation programme.
4. To hold officers to account for the delivery of an agreed efficiency and transformation programme.
5. To track and monitor the achievement of agreed financial savings.
6. To provide oversight of the Council's finances.

Membership

- A separate report on the membership of the Panel which will be considered at today's meeting recommends the following:
- All political party groupings should be represented.
- Each political party grouping should have one representative.
- Representatives should be drawn from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
- Support will be provided by the Chief Executive and other officers as required along with an independent advisor.

Ways of Working

- The Panel will decide arrangements for chairing the meetings.
- The Panel will meet once a month in line with the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee timetable.

Governance

- The Panel is not an executive body and therefore will not have decision-making powers. It is recommended that the Panel reports to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a regular basis.

Work Programme

April

- Discuss an outline paper on the direction and nature of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda.
- Discuss a general paper on the finances of the council.
- Consider the Review of the Centre report.

May

- Consider the outturn report on 2008/09 budgets.
- Consider a draft efficiency and transformation programme.
- Consider a report on the implementation of the Review of the Centre.
- Agree the appointment of the independent advisor.
- Training on the role of Members in scrutinising Council finances.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 1. Agree to the terms of reference for the Budget and Transformation Panel.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that each Political Party Grouping should have one representative on the Panel, with substitute Members being authorised to attend as and when required.

Local Authority Members' Associations Annual Spring Seminar

The Committee was advised that the Local Authority Members' Association was holding its Annual Spring Seminar in Portlaoise, County Laois on Thursday, 16th and Friday, 17th April. The business of the Seminar was such that it would allow Members, through participation in a series of workshops, to learn from Best Practice in other jurisdictions as well as explore innovative citizen-focused approaches being implemented by Local Authorities elsewhere. The Council had been represented at the Association's seminars for the past numbers of years and representatives attending had felt that it had given them a valuable opportunity to meet with Local Government representatives from throughout Ireland to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. The cost per delegate attending was £705, allowance for which had been included in the Revenue Budget.

The Committee authorised the attendance at the Annual Spring Seminar of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Council's representatives on the National Association of Councillors, Northern Ireland Region, the Head of Committee and Members' Services (or their nominees) and a representative of each of the Party Groupings on the Council not represented by the aforementioned Members.

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 members of staff who were related to existing officers of the Council.

The Committee noted the appointments.

Staff Establishment Control Framework

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the arrangements in place to control staff numbers and costs and to make recommendations for improvement.

Relevant Background Information

Staffing costs account for approximately 65% of the Council's net expenditure. The key expenditure headings in this area are salaries and wages, overtime payments and agency costs. Given the materiality of this expenditure type, it is essential in terms of probity and value for money that proper control and management is exercised.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee recognise that it has a key role to play because of its responsibility for the Council's finances as set out in the Standing Orders. For this reason it requested a report on how best the Council can exercise control of staff numbers.

Key Issues

Current Position

The following are the key controls which currently exist to control staff numbers and costs:

1. Each department has an agreed establishment which details the number and grades of staff employed.
2. Each department has a staffing budget which should be based on the agreed establishment.
3. The staffing budgets are monitored on a monthly basis.
4. Any changes to the establishment must be carried out in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation as approved by the Council on 1 March 2007.
5. The creation of any new post which can not be financed from the existing staffing budget must be approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
6. In order to make sure these controls are operating effectively an organisation staff vetting mechanism has been established and implemented. This means that departments do not create or fill posts or undertake structural reviews without first making a request in this regard to the corporate Human Resources section. These requests are then 'vetted' by Human Resources and Chief Officers' Management Team.

Further improvements - proposed monitoring framework

- In order to ensure improved scrutiny by Members of this area it is recommended that a report will be provided to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a quarterly basis which will detail staff numbers and costs for the relevant quarter and compare these to the same quarter last year. This report will also detail how much of our direct employee costs in 2008/09 and quarter one 2009/10 relate to agency workers and overtime payments.
- A baseline of staff numbers and direct employee costs detailing spend on overtime and agency workers is being established for the financial year 2008/09 in order to ensure effective prior year benchmarking can be achieved.
- These controls and monitoring arrangements will provide Members with assurance on the probity side of staff numbers and costs. The other major issue which Members have highlighted in this area is exercising scrutiny in terms of the value for money aspects of staff costs. It is recommended that employee costs should form one strand of the Budget and Transformation Panel work programme, for example the Panel may decide to explore ways of reducing agency and/or overtime costs.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note the controls in place to manage staff numbers and costs.
2. Agree to receive a quarterly report on staff numbers and costs.
3. Agree that employee costs should form one strand of the Budget and Transformation Panel work programme.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Asset Management

Land at Ryan Park, Castlereaigh

The Committee was advised that the Council had disposed of approximately 1.59 acres of land at Ryan Park, Ballygowan Road, to Ravenblack Developments Limited by way of a 999 year lease dated 5th July, 2002. The land adjoined Roselawn Cemetery and its use was restricted to warehousing/workshops and associated vehicle parking. The lease required the tenant to seek the Council's consent to any assignment or sub-letting of the land.

The Committee was informed that the former Parks and Cemeteries Services Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 10th October, 2006, had approved the assignment of the whole of the premises to T.G. Eakin Limited. That Company now wished to sub-let a portion of the premises to ASM Alternative Feeds Limited which was involved in the animal and poultry foods business. The proposed sub-lease would allow the sub-tenant access to the land contained in the 2002 lease but the portion they would actually occupy was on another part of the site and not actually part of the lands covered by the 2002 lease. Therefore, solicitors acting on behalf of the T.G. Eakin Limited had considered that Council consent for access should be obtained. Covenants contained in the proposed sub-lease restricted use of the premises to those uses defined in the 2002 lease granted by the Council.

The Committee consented to the sub-letting of the land at Ryan Park, Castlereagh.

Proposed Wayleave at Clement Wilson Park

The Committee was advised that a request had been received seeking approval to provide a mains water Wayleave across Council-owned lands at Clement Wilson Park. The water main was to be installed as part of the work on the regeneration of the Lagan Canal and had been commissioned by the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure. It was effectively a diversion of an existing water main. There would be no financial benefits to the Department in routing the water main across the Council's land and therefore it was considered appropriate that the Department be requested to make only a nominal payment in consideration of the grant of the Wayleave.

It was pointed out that the installation of the proposed water main would be located across half the width of a public path in the Council's ownership. The installation would involve temporary fencing around the works for a period of approximately two weeks. Any appropriate reinstatement of the land would be a requirement of any agreement which was drawn up with the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Committee granted authority to the entering into of a Wayleave Agreement with the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure to allow it to install and maintain a water main at Clement Wilson Park.

Land at Ballysillan - Iceland Foods PLC

The Committee was advised that approximately 5.37 acres of land at Ballysillan Road, adjacent to the Ballysillan Leisure Centre, which was held by the Parks and Leisure Committee, was leased by Iceland Foods PLC. The company held the site under a 125 year lease dated 22nd May, 2001. Under the terms of the Lease the ground rent for the site was to be reviewed every 5 years. A rent of £10,000 per annum was payable currently by Iceland Foods PLC from the commencement of the lease term, with the first rent review having been due from 22nd May, 2006.

The Committee was advised that protracted negotiations between the Estates Management Unit and Iceland Foods had failed to reach an agreement on the revised rent. Therefore, an independent expert from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors had been appointed to determine the revised rent. Whilst the terms of the lease provided for reference to the Lands Tribunal in the event of such a dispute, reference to an independent expert had been considered appropriate in terms of speed and cost. The independent expert had concluded in his determination that there had been no substantial change in the circumstances surrounding the value of the land over the intervening 5 years that would warrant any increase or decrease in the existing rent. Accordingly, the reviewed rent from 22nd May, 2006 had been fixed at £10,000 per annum till the next review scheduled for May, 2011.

Noted.

Appropriation of Land at Duncrue to the Corporate Land Bank

The Committee was advised that an area of land adjoining the Duncrue Complex had previously been used as a car compound as part of the Operation Clean-Up Initiative. The initiative had been terminated on 31st December, 2008 and a new replacement initiative, which was being undertaken by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and managed by the National Car Parks Limited, no longer required the use of the compound at Duncrue. Accordingly, the Health and Environmental Services Committee, at its meeting on 7th January, had declared the land surplus to its operational requirements and agreed that it be transferred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for inclusion within the Corporate Land Bank.

The Committee noted the appropriation of the aforementioned lands from the Health and Environmental Services Committee.

Land at Shore Road Playing Fields

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 23rd May, 2008, it had noted the appropriation of approximately 0.4 acres of land at the Shore Road Playing Fields to the Committee which was to be managed as part of the Corporate Land Bank and noted also that a further report on the longer term utilisation of the site would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

The Committee was reminded further that the land was currently let on Licence to the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle and was used by it as an overflow car parking area. The Licence was for a one-year period, terminable by either party on one month's notice, and the current financial receipt from the Licence was £10,000 per annum. The Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle had contacted the Council with a request for a new lease of at least 25 years duration.

The Committee was advised that the land in question formed part of a larger area of land acquired from the Belfast Education and Library Board. The former Parks and Amenities Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 9th March, 1999, had agreed to retain the land for the time being until market conditions were appropriate, but in the interim had agreed to the use of the site by the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle in order to generate some short-term income from the lands. The land is shown as "White Lands" in the Belfast Urban Area Plan and in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

Subject to the receipt of planning permission, it might therefore have development potential for a variety of uses. The value of the land would therefore reflect its development potential and an independent evaluation which had been undertaken a number of months ago, as part of the city's investment strategy, had indicated that this was potentially a very valuable site.

The Committee agreed not to accede to the request from the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle to enter into a 25 year lease agreement, permitted that organisation to continue to hold over on their Licence agreement pending an improvement in the property market and the completion of the Council's Corporate Asset Management Strategy and, in the interim, agreed also that a planning appraisal be undertaken in respect of the land.

Templemore Avenue – Former Public Convenience

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 13th June, 2008, it had declared surplus to Council requirements the public conveniences at Templemore Avenue, pending no alternative Council use having been identified, and had authorised the submission of an outline planning application for the demolition of the public conveniences and the redevelopment of the site for housing, with the site being placed subsequently for sale on the open market. The Committee was advised that outline planning approval had been granted on 18th December for the demolition of the public conveniences and the redevelopment of the site to provide a residential development of 6 town houses with gardens.

The Committee agreed to the immediate demolition of the public conveniences and agreed also that discussions be held with other public sector bodies regarding the disposal of the site, with a report thereon to be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Loughside Park: Development

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report in relation to the development of the Loughside Park to enable a special meeting of the Parks and Leisure Committee, to which the Members of the Development Committee would be invited, to be held to discuss the proposals in detail and to a report on the outcome of those discussions being submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for further consideration.

Loop River Open Space: Development

The Committee was reminded that the former Client Services Committee, at its meeting on 15th June, 2004, had agreed to the sale of approximately 0.973 acres of land at Loop River Open Space to the Corinthian Housing Association (later renamed as the Trinity Housing Association) and that the sale should be progressed to enable the development of social housing with replacement facilities. Disposal of the site in the sum of £860,000 had been approved subsequently by the Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries) Services Sub-Committee at its meeting on 7th February, 2005.

The Director of Improvement reported that, following the granting of outline planning approval, the sale of land to the Trinity Housing Association had been completed in November, 2007, with the purchase monies having been paid to the Council. In line with the Council's Gates process, an economic appraisal had been undertaken which recommended that the replacement facilities provided should comprise enhanced outdoor play facilities, a kick-about area and associated works. The recommended proposals differed from the letter of consent for the outline planning approval but, following discussions with the Planning Service, were considered to fall within the spirit of the approval.

The Committee noted the current position and agreed to proceed with the development of the enhanced outdoor play facilities, the kick-about area and associated works, which had been identified as a most appropriate option by the economic appraisal, subject to full planning permission being granted for the overall joint development proposals.

Capital Programme Loan Sanctions

The Committee was reminded that it had agreed previously to advance a number of capital projects as "committed". While some of those schemes were fully or significantly grant-aided, many were financed from the Council's own funds. The principal sources of funds to finance such net capital expenditure were revenue contributions, loans and capital receipts. At its meeting on 21st November, the Committee had been advised that the forecast for net capital expenditure during 2008/09 which was to be financed by loan had amounted to £21.9 million. Accordingly, approval was sought for the submission of applications to the Department of the Environment for sanction to the raising of loans associated with the expenditure for the following schemes:

| | £ |
|--|---------------|
| Roselawn Cemetery – Land Acquisition and Development | 1.7 million |
| Adelaide Exchange Fit Out | 2.54 million |
| Waste Transfer Station and Associated Works | 5.80 million |
| Leisure Services – Fitness Equipment and Lockers | 1.25 million |
| Refurbishment of the City Hall | 12.40 million |

The Committee approved the submission of the applications for the loans sanctions as outlined.

Capital Programme\Major Programmes Update – Affordability and Prioritisation

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose

The purpose of this report are as follows:

- To update Members on the Capital Programme 2008/09.
- To discuss future affordability issues for the Capital Programme 2009/10 onwards.
- To discuss the prioritisation of the capital programme and other major projects.

Current Position

In total there are 67 committed projects in the Capital Programme – 55 are underway and 12 are in the procurement phase. In addition, there are 40 emerging schemes.

In terms of finance, based on figures for the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2008), the projected capital expenditure for 2008/09 amounts to £28.1m and the projected loan requirement is £20.3m.

In order to complete all of the 53 schemes already committed in the Capital Programme, it is estimated that the total loan requirement will be £56.4m.

At present the Council’s affordability limit for loans stands at £45m (£15m per annum over three years up to 2009/10).

This means that the Council’s commitments for the Capital Programme are in excess of the affordability limit by £11.4m, from 2011 onwards.

The main reason that the affordability limit is projected to be exceeded is that the Council is no longer in a position to finance capital expenditure through revenue contributions to the degree it has done in the past.

WAY FORWARD

Finances

Obviously the Council needs to urgently address the capital financing shortfall, as a matter of urgency. The current strategy was devised in a different economic climate and at a time when interest rates were a lot higher than they are today.

It is therefore recommended that the Council avails of the use of an independent expert in capital financing arrangements to make recommendations on the future capital financing options available to the Council.

Members should note that this work needs done in the context of the Council's medium term financial planning.

Capital Programme Prioritisation

On the assumption that additional capital financing can be secured the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will need to play an important role in deciding which new schemes should be progressed and monitor their delivery to ensure value for money is provided to the rate payer.

To support the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee fulfil these roles, officers have been working with Drivers Jonas – experts in this field – to develop robust prioritisation and monitoring mechanisms.

This process will allow Members to decide at an early stage which schemes should be progressed for more detailed consideration before they are included or not in the Capital Programme.

It is also likely that the Strategic Policy and resources Committee will have to make tough decisions in determining which of the potential projects should actually start. For example, schemes totalling £50m may be deemed as viable by the gates process but the Council can only afford to spend £25m. In this case Members will need a means of prioritising across schemes in the context an affordability limit. Officers have been working with Drivers Jonas to develop a prioritisation matrix which will help Members decide across schemes.

It is recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is provided with a briefing session on the gates and prioritisation process at it meeting in June.

Other Major Projects

As part of its leadership and place-shaping roles, the Council is involved to varying degrees of engagement with a large number of major development projects across the city. This includes projects which are being developed and delivered in partnership with others; projects being developed by other agencies but where the Council is the key land owner; and others where the views of the Council are being sought. In order to ensure that the Council provides leadership and allocates resources effectively, in terms of money, assets and Member and officer time, Members will need to prioritise the Council's involvement

in development projects. To do this, Members need to have a better understanding of the projects being developed across the city and in particular those which directly impact on their area of the city. For this reason the Chief Executive has arranged a number of briefings at the end of the month for Members on this subject. All Members are encouraged to attend these important sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

1. Note the current position of the Capital Programme 2008/09.
2. Engage an independent expert to make recommendations on the future capital financing options available to the Council.
3. Agree to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee receiving a briefing session on the gate and prioritisation process for the Capital Programme at its meeting in June 2009.
4. Attend briefing sessions arranged by the Chief Executive on major city development projects.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Good Relations and Equality

Minutes of Good Relations Partnership

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

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the Good Relations Partnership of 13th March and adopted the recommendation seeking the Committee's authority for an appropriate Share by Design Framework to be commissioned at a cost to the Council of £15,000, which would be recouped from the Special European Union Programme's Body under the Peace III Programmes, together with funding of £10,000 from the Community Relations Council.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Consultation Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – Excellence and Choice: Adult Mental Health Services

The Committee was advised that a further round of consultation exercises was being undertaken by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on its future service delivery, consisting of four “Excellence and Choice” consultations, three of which were linked to adult mental health services and one in relation to services for older people.

The Committee agreed that the consultation documents be referred to the Party Groupings on the Council for individual consideration and comment to enable the Members to highlight local circumstances or issues, particularly from a local service user perspective, which then could be taken into account by the Belfast Trust.

Chairman