

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 24th April, 2009

MEETING OF Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Members present: Councillor D. Dodds (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor D. Browne); and
Councillors Adamson, Attwood, M. Browne, W. Browne,
Convery, Crozier, N. Kelly, Kirkpatrick, Lavery,
A. Maskey, C. Maskey, P. Maskey, McCann, Rodway,
Smyth and Stoker.

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

Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Newton.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st April, subject to the omission of that portion of the minute under the heading "Capital Programme Loan Sanctions" in so far as it related to a loan sanction for the fit-out of the Adelaide Exchange which, at the request of Councillor McCarthy, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Capital Programme Loan Sanctions - Adelaide Exchange Fit-out

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 20th March in relation to the Adelaide Exchange Fit-out. An extract in that regard is set out hereunder:

"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:

	£
.....	
Adelaide Exchange Fit Out	2.54 million
.....	

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

The Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee that he had discussed with Councillor McCarthy, at whose request the matter had been taken back to the Committee, the reasons why a loan sanction was required for the fit-out of Adelaide Exchange and Councillor McCarthy had indicated that he was satisfied that the loan was required.

Accordingly, the Committee affirmed its decision of 20th March and approved the submission of an application for a loan sanction of £2.54 million for the Adelaide Exchange Fit-out.

Transition Committee Business

Review of Public Administration: Transfer of Functions

The Committee considered the undernoted report which provided an update in relation to the transfer of functions which were being considered as part of the Review of Public Administration:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Members will be aware that a Transfer of Functions Working Group was established, under the auspices of Review of Public Administration (RPA) Policy Development Panel C, to examine the package of functions proposed to transfer from central to local government resulting from the RPA and provide greater clarity in terms of the scope of the transferring functions; the resources (or otherwise) attached to the functions; and to identify those issues which needed to be addressed or required further clarification prior to transfer. The Transfer of Functions Working Group was chaired by the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, with several other local government Chief Executives as members of the Group.

- 1.2** It was recognised from the outset that there was an urgent need for engagement between central and local government officials to ensure that there was greater clarity around the functions transferring and appropriate consideration given to the potential consequences for councils of the transfer proposals in relation to issues such as efficiency, resources and liabilities.
- 1.3** To support this process a series of Technical Sub-Groups (e.g DoE Planning; DRD Roads; DETI; DARD; DCAL) was established comprising of senior officials from both transferring Departments and local government. Constructive engagement and dialogue between central and local government officials has taken place over the last number of weeks to work through the operational, technical and managerial issues associated with the transfer of functions. Members will note that senior officers from within Belfast City Council had been directly involved in this process.
- 1.4** As part of these discussions consideration was given to potential proposals in regard to marginal changes to the transferring functions where this was justified on a service delivery basis and taking into account the principles of strong local government; the role of local government in supporting place shaping; the need for single point accountability at the local level; ensuring improved customer centric services; and value for money considerations.

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1** This work has culminated in the development of a suite of initial detailed draft reports from each of the Transferring Functions Sub Groups and an over-arching covering paper setting out the high level issues which needs to be addressed in moving forward. The papers were presented to Policy Development Panel C at its meeting on 26th March and the Strategic Leadership Board at its meeting on the 10th April 2009 for initial consideration.
- 2.2** I would refer Members to the recent presentation delivered to SLB on 10th April 2009 which sets out the high level cross-cutting issues which need to be taken into consideration and contains initial proposals emerging from the Technical Sub Groups in regards to marginal changes to the transfer of functions including the NON TRANSFER of potential functions (e.g. particular roads functions including salting footways, grass cutting, weed spraying, gully

emptying and street lighting; and travellers transit sites) and the transfer of ADDITIONAL functions (e.g. on-street car parking from DRD and the Living Over the Shops programme from DSD). Such proposals are still subject to further political consideration, Ministerial direction and NI Executive approval. Whilst the detailed rationale underpinning the proposals put forward by the relevant Sub Groups has been circulated, a summary of the key cross-cutting issues and proposed marginal changes is outlined below for Members consideration.

Cross-Cutting Implementation Issues

2.3 The work undertaken to date has answered some key questions, it has also identified a number of areas that will need further consideration and which need to be worked through over the next number of months. Some of the high level implementation issues identified include:

- 2.3.1 (i) *Budget & Resources:* Issues around resources and budgets are becoming increasingly complex as the process of initial due diligence continues to highlight the current shortfalls and uncertainties around the future funding of transferring functions. There is real concern around the insufficiency of funding available to deliver the majority of functions proposed to transfer to local government. There are significant under estimates of the true cost of the current delivery of some of the functions proposed to transfer and, therefore, there is a need for a more thorough due diligence review of resources (both budgets and staffing) to be undertaken in advance of transfer.

There is a need also for early engagement and negotiation with central government and, in particular, DFP regarding the future funding regime for transferring functions and the impact this might have on local rates. This is further exacerbated by the fact that a large number of the proposed functions to transfer will be subject to CSR bidding as part of the new CSR period in 2011. Therefore, it will be important that local government be engaged in this process as it will become the future statutory owner of the function and be responsible for its delivery.

- 2.3.2 (ii) *Allocation of budget and resources:* Further consideration must be given to the means by which budgets and resources are to be disaggregated across the 11 new councils with the transfer of functions post 2011. Under the current policy frameworks, a large majority of central government investment (e.g. particularly DSD physical regeneration and programme related spend) is targeted towards addressing multi-deprivation and, therefore, Belfast is a key beneficiary of such funding.

It is likely that in moving forward within the RPA process, there will be a growing lobby from other parts of local government to revisit the future allocation of funding with a view to evenly spreading the available resources across all local government. As discussed at the recent cross-party briefings scheduled on a North, South, East and West basis, if there is a vacuum in the decision making process within the Council and an absence of an agreed package of projects/priorities on which the Council can bid for resources, there is a significant risk that substantial resources will be reallocated elsewhere.

- 2.3.3 (iii) *Simplified Governance and Integrated Service Delivery:* With regard to the transfer of function proposals and associated 'statutory powers', if councils are to effectively deliver community planning and make a positive and lasting improvement to the wellbeing of communities, there must be greater integration/ co-ordination of public services and the targeting of resources at the local level. Consideration should also be given to the potential for closer integration of the transferring functions with other functions currently undertaken by councils. Clearly there are overlaps and connections between key functional areas such as planning, urban and rural development, local economic development, tourism development, community development etc. All efforts need to be taken to ensure service delivery is rationalised and potential synergies secured.

- 2.3.4 (iv) *Policy Development:* Notwithstanding the final agreed position in regards to functions proposed to transfer, it is essential that local government continues to shape and influence public service delivery at the local level and has a greater role in informing policy

development. If councils are to effectively deliver community planning and make a positive and lasting improvement to the wellbeing of communities, there must be greater integration and coordination of public services and the targeting of resources at the local level. A recommended requirement emerging from the Transfer of Functions Working Group is the need for a statutory based engagement framework between central and local government which is linked to the broader community planning agenda, incorporated within the governance proposals in regards to future central and local government relations and underpinned by the performance framework which is to be developed.

- 2.3.5 (v) *Consultation and Engagement:* It is important to note that there are a number of policy frameworks and programmes under development (e.g. new Northern Ireland Enterprise Strategy, Second Tourism Strategic Framework for Action; Rural Development Programme) and strategic reviews and consultation processes underway (e.g. Barnett Review; Reform of the Planning Service) which are pertinent to discussions in regards to the transfer of functions and will inevitably impact upon the future delivery of such functions. Local government must ensure that it is actively engaged as a key government partner rather than merely a consultee in these processes.

Proposed Marginal Changes to Transfer of Functions Proposals

- 2.4 Whilst the Transfer of Functions Technical Sub Groups has raised a number of significant issues which will need to be worked through as we move forward into the implementation phase of the RPA, there are a number of proposals put forward by the Sub Groups with regards to potential marginal changes (e.g. both non-transfer and the additional transfer of specific functions from central to local government). The proposals relate primarily to the transfer of functions from both the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Roads Service and Department for Social Development (DSD).

**DRD Roads Service Technical Sub Group –
NON TRANSFER Proposals**

- 2.4.1 There is a clear absence of any strategic framework, rationale or business case for the proposed transfer of the 11 fragmented public realm aspects of local roads.
- 2.4.2 Generally the functions proposed to transfer are significantly under-resourced and have major public liabilities. As the full responsibility for the maintenance of local roads is not proposed to transfer, the management of such liabilities will be very difficult and the sustainability of future funding uncertain. There is also a need for significant capital investment in the proposed transfer of functions which there is currently no budget. The transfer proposals offer little scope to develop a strategic approach and integration of local roads management within broader local development planning and urban regeneration functions which are all key levers to improving the wellbeing of communities.
- 2.4.3 Accordingly, the Sub Group recommended, for the consideration of both PDP C and the Strategic Leadership Board, a number of functions which local government should demand should not transfer including: the maintenance of amenity areas; salting of footways; grass cutting/weed spraying; gully emptying; and street lighting. The justification put forward included:
- (i) **Salting Footways**
- Considerable public liability risks and associated insurance costs
 - Considerable costs to deliver
 - No financial or asset transfer proposed
 - Difficulty in separating public liability for footpaths and roads – accountability
 - Existing arrangements adequate for Councils involvement if so desired
- (ii) **Grass Cutting/Weed Spraying**
- Considerable public liability risks
 - Grass cutting intrinsically linked to road safety
 - weed spraying intrinsically linked to road maintenance
 - significant Health & Safety issues and disposal of residual waste difficulties
 - scope to enhance such areas without any transfer

- (iii) **Gully Emptying**
 - part of the overall local roads maintenance package
 - significant public liability implications - links to flood control
 - Would result in greater bureaucracy and confusion for the citizen
 - Additional middleman in the process
- (iv) **Street Lighting**
 - closely related to other highway maintenance and road safety functions
 - significant public liabilities
 - significantly under resourced
 - massive under investment in replacing stock – capital replacement time bomb
 - significant capital costs in separating local street lighting network from the strategic road network
 - create additional confusion for the citizen & reduce accountability
 - councils can already contribute to improved lighting schemes – resource implications

DSD Technical Sub Group – NON TRANSFER Proposals

- 2.4.4 (v) **Travellers' transit sites:** The Sub Group put forward the proposition that the proposed transfer of Travellers' Transit Sites should remain within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as the regional strategic housing authority and delivered as one package. It should be noted that the transfer of responsibility for all Traveller accommodation to the NIHE resulted from a detailed consultation and EQIA exercise undertaken in 2003. Therefore, further clarification would be required in terms of the policy reasons and relevant business case to overturn this agreed position with the proposed transfer of Travellers' Transit sites to local government.

**DRD Roads Service Technical Sub Group –
NEW TRANSFER Proposals**

- 2.4.5 (vi) **On-Street Car Parking:** In terms of the proposal to transfer off-street car parking to local government, the Sub Group advocated the need to transfer both off-street and on-street car parking to local government as it would be inefficient to split the functions and would detract from service delivery and single point accountability. This would require Ministerial consideration and approval.

DSD Technical Sub Group – NEW TRANSFER Proposals

- 2.4.6 (v) Living over the Shop: Given the potential capacity of the LOTS initiative to support town centre regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, and the potential integration with local economic development delivery and the synergies with Local Development Planning which is to transfer to councils, the Technical Sub Group called for consideration to be given to the inclusion of this function as part of the transfer proposals. Again, this would require Ministerial consideration and approval.

- 2.4.6 *Members will note that further detail on each of the aforementioned issues is included in the SLB covering report which has previously been circulated as well as detailed consideration and commentary on the specific issues associated with each departmental functional area.*

3.0 Next Steps

- 3.1 Members will note that there has been broad agreement among PDP C and SLB in regards to those key issues which require further consideration and negotiation and in regards to the proposals around the transfer of additional functions from central to local government. However, there is no party political consensus on the proposals not to transfer specific functions from the DRD Roads Service with one party calling for all proposed functions to transfer.
- 3.2 Accordingly, it would be the intention that formal correspondence will be sent to the Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, setting out where there has been both agreement and disagreement reached as part of the transfer of functions discussions, highlighting where further work is required and requesting the Environment Minister to begin negotiations at Executive Sub Committee level to address the outstanding issues. As there is no consensus on the functions proposed to transfer from DRD Roads Service, this matter will be referred to the DRD Minister for consideration and direction.
- 3.3 The initial discussions and consideration given to the transfer of functions should only be the beginning of an ongoing and evolving process between central and local government over the next 12-18 months. It is important to note however, that there will be a number of issues in relation to, for example, agreeing the package of functions

to transfer which will need to be fast-tracked given the fact that Government Departments must meet a tight legislative timetable for taking forward necessary tranches of legislation and drafting Transfer of Functions Orders. Appropriate flexibility must be build into the initial drafting of legislation to enable further discussions around issues such as resources, staffing, assets and liabilities etc to continue.

- 3.4 In regards to the Belfast situation, clearly the Council will need to continue to engage at both political and officer level with relevant central government departments and Ministers in regards to the transfer of functions issue and to determine the detail around what will transfer specifically to the new Belfast City Council. Consideration should also be given to the potential for the Council to take forward pilots or partnership projects with central government departments in advance of the transfer. Members will note that both DSD and DoE (Planning Service) have already nominated senior officials who it is intended would work with the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. Strategic Policy and Resources Committee) and Transition Management Team (i.e. Chief Officers' Management Team) to take forward detailed discussions around the transfer of functions and associated resources.

4.0 Resource Implications

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

5.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (a) note the contents of this report and the appendices attached; and
- (b) provide any initial feedback/comments on the emerging proposals and issues identified in regards to the proposed transfer of functions from central to local government to Kevin Heaney, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer, Core Improvement Team (ext. 6202)."

After discussion, during which the Members expressed the view that there was a need for the Council to have responsibility for major regeneration projects particularly in the Belfast City centre and the need also to ensure that there was no deficit between the transfer of functions and the finance required to undertake neighbourhood renewal schemes, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Department of the Environment Consultation on Severance Arrangements for Councillors

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report in relation to the Department of the Environment's Consultation Paper on Severance Arrangements for Councillors to enable the Party Groupings on the Council to consider the matter.

The Following Business was Transacted by the Members Acting as the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee Cross-Cutting Issues

Working Towards a More Integrated Safer City Agenda

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"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 its leadership role in both the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and District Policing Partnership (DPP) as well as through the delivery of services by a number of departments. At various Committee and full Council meetings, Members 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.

A report outlining the issues of concern was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th March. At this meeting, the Committee agreed to an invitation being sent to all Members to participate in a safer city workshop, which was held on 6th April 2009.

Since the previous report on 20th March, the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice has issued a consultation document on the future of CSPs and DPPs - '*Local Partnership Working on Policing and Community Safety: a way forward*', and has asked for initial comments on the general principles detailed in the paper by the end of April, with an extended timeframe to the end of May for more detailed comments. This approach was confirmed as appropriate by the NIO official at the safer city workshop, in response to members' concerns over the short timeframe. The consultation document which has been circulated.

Key Issues

Safer City Workshop

The safer city workshop was attended by Members from all Parties and by chief and senior officers from across a number of departments. Notes from the workshop are attached in Appendix 1. In summary, the key actions that need to be taken forward at this stage are:

- CSP/DPP staff to be brought together under one Service and management structure;
- A proposal paper to be developed and agreed though the political system with actions to outline how to better align the work and outcomes of both partnerships;
- The feasibility of organising joint CSP/DPP meetings around a number of key issues to be pursued;
- The Northern Ireland Policing Board to be approached to review the Code of Practice that governs the DPP administrative and delivery functions;
- A single point of contact to be put in place within the Council on safer city;
- The Transition Committee to be engaged in discussions around rationalising community engagement structures in preparation for community planning.

As firmer proposals around these actions are developed they will be brought back to this Committee for agreement.

Consultation on CSPs and DPPs

In terms of the consultation document, the paper proposes that the NIO aims to have integrated partnerships combining all of the functions of the CSPs and DPPs in place to coincide with the changes to local government planned for the Spring of 2011, whilst acknowledging that the final decision on the shape of the integrated partnerships will need to be taken in the devolved context by a local Minister. It also suggests that, once we have established a vision for future arrangements for local partnership working, progress should be made on implementing interim measures to bring the two partnerships closer together, in anticipation of further integration in the future.

At the safer city workshop mentioned above there was a general consensus in favour of the principle of creating fully integrated partnerships in the longer term and on taking steps as soon as possible to align more closely the work and approaches of the CSP and DPP within Belfast. It is proposed that the Council makes an interim response to the NIO Minister outlining this view and that a more detailed report is brought back in May in respect of the specific questions posed in the consultation document.

Resource Implications

None at this stage.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the discussions which took place at the safer city workshop; and
- Agree that the Council provides an interim response to the NIO, stating that it is in agreement with the principle of creating fully integrated partnerships in the longer term and on taking steps as soon as possible to more closely align the work and approaches of CSPs and DPPs.

Key to Abbreviations

**CSP - Community Safety Partnership
DPP - District Policing Partnership
NIO - Northern Ireland Office**

Several Members requested that the future work location of the staff of the District Policing Partnership be given careful consideration. In addition, a Member pointed out it would be vital to ensure that police accountability would continue to remain a principal responsibility of any new or combined partnership and that it could be carried out impartially and effectively.

In response, the Head of Environmental Health explained that a number of reports would be submitted to the Committee in relation to the points which had been mentioned. She stated that a separate report regarding the staffing and the management structure, together with the proposed location of the staff, was being prepared currently. In addition, a detailed report on how the work and outcomes of the two Partnerships could be better aligned was being developed and that paper would cover the need to maintain and build on the current monitoring role in respect of the work of the Police.

After further discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Response to Notice of Motion re: Presbyterian Mutual Society

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd February, had passed the following Notice of Motion:

“This Council calls upon the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown MP, to take immediate steps to ensure that members of and investors in the Presbyterian Mutual Society are covered by the same financial guarantee scheme as those savers with deposits in UK banks.”

The Head of Committee and Members' Services reported that correspondence had been received from Ian Pearson M.P., Economic Secretary to the Treasury, outlining the Government's position and indicating that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was carrying out a review of the regulatory framework applicable to credit unions and industrial and provident societies in Northern Ireland and stating that it would be premature for the Government to comment until those enquiries had been completed. He had indicated also that the Society's Members had voted on the Administrator's proposals to run down the business and that a further report on that matter would be issued in May.

The Committee noted receipt of the correspondence.

Conductive Education for Children with Cerebral Palsy - Response from the Minister

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th February, it had considered a request from the Mayor of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council seeking support for conductive education for children with cerebral palsy and, in particular, the ongoing funding crisis experienced by the Buddy Bear Trust School, located in Dungannon, which was the only educational establishment in Northern Ireland currently delivering that type of education. The Committee had expressed its support for conductive education in general and had called on the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to bring forward as a matter of urgency recommendations for the delivery of conductive education, including financial and physical resources.

The Head of Committee and Members' Services advised the Members that a response had been received from the Minister with Responsibility for Education. The Minister had outlined the Department's Policy in relation to the funding of Independent Schools and the provision of funding for children with special educational needs. In addition, she had indicated that she had met with representatives of the Buddy Bear Trust to discuss funding proposals but, at that stage, none of the options which had been presented had proved viable.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Asset Management

Arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Facilities - North Foreshore Community Consultation

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

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Council that the matter of the transfer of the North Foreshore 17 acre site to arc21 be referred to a special meeting of the Council to be held at 5.00 p.m. on 9th June, 2009 for final decision and that representatives of Social Market Research be requested to present the consultation findings at the meeting. The Committee noted that a full report on the consultation would be issued in advance of the Special Meeting.

The Director of Health and Environmental Services emphasised the importance of the Council taking a final decision in the matter at the Special Meeting in order to limit the Council's vulnerability to substantial non-compliance costs. In addition, he requested the Members to consider whether there was any additional information required before the Special Meeting in order to help inform the process and facilitate decision making and it was agreed that Party Group briefings be held if required.

Duncrue Complex Fuel Storage Facilities and Associated Infrastructure Works

The Committee was reminded that the existing fuel station at the Duncrue Complex had been in place for approximately 30 years and had reached the end of its operational life. A proposal had been included in the Capital Programme for the replacement of the fuel station, including the storage tanks, infrastructure for the fuel pumps and canopy. At its meeting on 22nd February, 2008 the Committee had requested that the possibility of the capital cost of the proposal being met by a private sector operator under a franchise agreement be investigated.

The Director of Improvement reported that, following public advertisement, only one expression of interest in providing and operating a refuelling facility had been received. However, the submission had been incomplete and there had been no response to requests for further information. Therefore, an economic appraisal had been commissioned to consider various options, including a shared facility and potential alternative locations. The recommendation of the appraisal was that the Council should proceed with the provision and operation of the replacement refuelling facility on an "in-house" basis.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that tenders be sought for the replacement of the fuel storage facilities and associated infrastructure works, with the award of the contract being made on the basis of the most economically advantageous offer received in terms of cost and quality and in accordance with the Council's Procurement Procedures. The Committee noted that the cost of the replacement of the refuelling facility was £630,000 and agreed to an application being made to the Department of the Environment for the sanction to the raising of a loan for the cost of the project.

Levels of Rents Payable by Community and Other Organisations

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided information in relation to the level of rents payable by community and other organisations and authorised the carrying out on a cross-Departmental basis of further investigations into options which might be available to reduce the level of rents payable under some or all of the current 36 leases to community/charitable/sporting organisations with a further report thereon being submitted to the Committee in due course. The Committee agreed also that the aforementioned report should identify clearly the organisations involved.

Customer and IS Strategies

(Ms. R. Crozier, Head of Information Services Belfast, and Mr. T. Martin, Head of Building Control, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Background

The Council is in the process of developing a number of initiatives to improve services and information for its customers. These include strategies for customer focus, consultation and engagement, IT and communications and are all interlinked with reviewing the corporate centre of the organisation.

Citizens want news and information and, in particular, access to services 24 hours a day. The 9-5 culture of service delivery is a thing of the past. They also want more focused and improved services that are transparently delivered, adaptable and good value. This means we need to re-examine how we do things at every level. There are also increasing pressures from Westminster and Europe to provide on-line public services. New technology is the key to achieving accessible services and information.

The majority of local authorities have invested most of their time and energy on the traditional communications and service methods. Some of the more forward thinking authorities are adopting the business principles and practices of the best private sector organisations. This means fully innovative customer consultation and service delivery mechanisms, of which the key strategy is the commitment to providing the full range of services and information on-line and using modern technology.

Belfast City Council needs to urgently move in this direction and is playing catch-up at this time. The RPA will bring more services and responsibilities and the implementation of an ambitious corporate plan underway. Now is the time for the organisation to commit to changing business practices, back office procedures and investing in new technology to provide our ratepayers with the opportunities to utilise our services, receive information and be consulted with in ways and at times that are convenient to them.

New technology can also assist elected representatives to perform their functions even more effectively. It can enable the organisation to help them become more accessible to the electorate and can ensure they receive information, updates on Council business and information and news alerts in a timely and effective way.

It remains vital that Belfast City Council continues to develop its progressive approach to the traditional forms of service and communications. Additionally now is the time for the Council to consider investing more time and resources in the new channels of communications, particularly in its efforts to reach younger and older audiences, ethnic minorities and other Section 75 groupings which are regarded as harder to reach.

This approach ties in with the 'Organisation fit to lead and serve' theme of the Corporate Plan which aims to improve the Council's capacity to deliver excellent services. The customer and IT strategies and the review of communications evaluation all highlight the need to focus during the next few years on adopting new technology as a means of delivering better services and information for citizens and to deliver services more efficiently. The strategies emphasise the following key points:

Customer Service

Improving how we serve the citizens of Belfast is at the heart of the Council's improvement agenda. We must deliver services that are of an acceptable standard that enable citizens to access information and services in ways that provide them with choice and convenience. We aim to improve our customers' experience of the Council through improvement in contact, service delivery, staff capability and supporting systems, processes and infrastructure. The four key areas under the strategy are:

- Building a customer intelligence base.
- Improving business processes and systems
- Improving access to Services and reducing avoidable contacts
- Improving learning & development by making better use of all our existing resources

Communication

Belfast City Council is a leader in developing the city's vision and shaping the city's future. We exist because of our citizens and therefore how we communicate is of prime importance. We have achieved great successes with City Matters and our Council website but we need to acknowledge that the public's expectations of how

services are made available and used are changing with rapidly changing technology and its availability. We need to adopt new methods of connecting with the public, particularly the hard to reach sections, to ensure that citizens are getting the information they want and need from the council. .

Information Management

This is about ensuring that information is of high quality, is accessible and shared in a way that supports effective decision making, successful performance management and high quality continually improving service delivery. To achieve this we must ensure that we have appropriate systems, processes and technology to enable the business of the Council and to challenge our ability to deliver services in more efficient and effective ways. Through improved use and management of information, the framework will enable the Council to realise the following aims:

- To deliver increasingly effective services
- To optimise access to those services by the general public and Council employees
- To inform, involve and engage key audiences including the public and partners.

Recommendations

It is clear from the strategies outlined that there are overlaps and that serving customer better and delivering efficiencies emerge as common objectives. It is recommended that the priorities for the year ahead are to improve on-line services and to develop customer service standards across the Council services. In summary this means:

- Delivery of Citizen Services

The Council should implement a programme of improved web-based services for the general public. This will include an upgraded website being the priority with all council services becoming fully transactional online. Different delivery channels will be used where this is appropriate to target different groups (e.g. SMS text messaging, online booking improvements and faster information downloads, etc). This strategy will encourage, at every level, the use of technology where it can be shown to add efficiency, cost savings, and improved services.

- **Developing Service Standards**

All services need to challenge how they are performing and how they measure up in terms of the customers' experience of their service. The Council can improve service delivery by making the adoption of service standards a priority in their service plans. There will be a need for common standards for example how we communicate and deal with customer contact. A service standard approach will establish a baseline for measurement and enable us to build on best practice as evidenced internally and externally and support accreditation against a nationally agreed standard.

Governance structures are in place to support implementing IT but in developing the strategies and having identified common themes it is recognised that in order to achieve the right outcomes the scope of governance should be broadened to include customer and communication.

It is therefore recommended that Council commits to getting the maximum advantage from technology by reviewing its governance arrangements to ensure that resources are aligned to support the objectives of the strategies and to deliver the maximum efficiencies.

Resource Implications

In the current financial climate there is a renewed focus on better use of existing capacity and investing in technology to improve what we do to deliver more for less.

It is proposed that Council considers creating mechanisms to incentivise business transformation for corporate and departmental improvements and that this is achieved through reinvesting some of the savings gained back into improvement projects.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to endorse the proposed strategies and priorities for the year ahead. Next steps will be to bring forward business cases and detailed plans for approval."

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association IS Strategy Consultation

(Ms. R. Crozier, Head of Information Services Belfast, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was advised that during April, 2008 the Northern Ireland Local Government Association had commissioned Deloitte to assist with the development of a draft IS Strategy for Local Authorities in Northern Ireland. Funding for the project had been provided by the Delivery and Innovation Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel. A project board had been formed to oversee the development of the project, which had resulted in the issuing by the Association of a draft Strategy for consultation.

The Head of Information Services Belfast explained that the main aim of the project had been to define key priorities for Local Authorities in view of the Review of Public Administration and to highlight the main business and technological challenges and constraints which they would be facing. Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee support, in principle, the development of a common IS Strategy for Local Government within Northern Ireland. Such a Strategy would:

- enable service delivery benefits to be linked directly to citizens priorities;
- emphasise the importance of the IT function in the strategic delivery of services;
- enable operational efficiencies to be realised as well as ensuring reliable delivery of IT services;
- enable greater integration between systems to avoid duplication of effort;
- consider how secure, reliable and trusted relationships could be maintained between citizens and local government irrespective of how interactions take place;
- increase the accessibility of relevant and appropriate information to partner organisations;
- promote the need for cleansing and unifying the data structures held across Councils at both local and regional level to promote information sharing, storage and general data availability;
- promote the use of geo-spatial data and information for appropriate business areas;

- endorse the requirement for enhanced performance management, business intelligence and reporting tools which increase the quality and ease of reporting while also allowing greater customer insight;
- recognise the benefits to be gained by implementation of mobile technology in a range of Council environments; and
- provide the ability to work more flexibly, including home working.

The Head of Information Services Belfast pointed out that, within the current draft Strategy, there remained uncertainties in relation to how it would be implemented given the current absence of any funding and a lack of clarity around the necessary governance arrangements and capacity to deliver. In addition, the Strategy did not take account of the functions which would transfer from Central Government following the Review of Public Administration in terms of information assets, infrastructure and service delivery.

The Committee agreed to endorse, in principle, the development of a common IS Strategy for Local Government in Northern Ireland, subject to further clarification being provided in terms of the resources, governance and capacity to be put in place to support its implementation and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association being advised formally of the Council's position.

Democratic Services and Governance

Memorial to Servicemen and Women

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 3rd September, 2007, had passed the following resolution:

“This Council acknowledges the tremendous support and sacrifice made by Her Majesties Forces during thirty-five years of conflict in Northern Ireland. Operation Banner was the longest running campaign in military history, a campaign which saw the loss of many lives. Peace in Northern Ireland came at a heavy price but without the selfless dedication and commitment of the British Army, Ulster Defence Regiment, Royal Irish Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary/Police Service of Northern Ireland this great City and, indeed, the entire Province would have found itself in a state of civil war. The Council welcomes the ending of Operation Banner but must be ever mindful of the ultimate sacrifice many had to pay for peace. The Council agrees to construct a fitting memorial to the Servicemen and women who helped to maintain peace and law and order during the duration of Operation Banner.”

The Head of Committee and Members' Services explained that since the final part of the resolution agreed to construct a "fitting memorial" to Servicemen and women and the return to the City Hall would take place by September, 2009, it would now be appropriate to give consideration to the form that the memorial should take. He pointed out that the Committee, at its meeting on 14th November, 2008, had agreed that the six elected Members on the Good Relations Steering Panel should act as a cross-party reference group to discuss the display of City Hall memorabilia in the longer term and to agree a programme of work and the acquisition of materials to ensure that the items on display in the City Hall were representatives of all communities in the City.

The Committee agreed that the matter be referred to the cross-party reference group so that it could be considered as part of the overall review of memorabilia with a suggestion that the memorial should take the form of a stained-glass window and that a report, detailing the options as to the form which the memorial to Servicemen and women should take, be submitted for the Committee's attention within six months.

Armed Forces Day

The Committee was advised that the first Armed Forces Day was being held on Saturday, 27th June, 2009. The aim of the Day was to raise public awareness of the contribution which had been made to society by the Armed Forces, including veterans and cadets, and it was understood that the intention was that the event should be held on an annual basis. The Head of Committee and Members' Services advised the Members that correspondence had been received from the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff of the Ministry of Defence seeking the co-operation of Local Authorities to organise events to mark the day, with a National Event being hosted in a chosen location. In Northern Ireland, the focal point for the celebrations would be Carrickfergus Borough Council and steps were being taken to identify the most appropriate and inclusive approach to the event, which would be organised by that Council and the Army in Northern Ireland.

One of the official activities which the Ministry of Defence was requesting Local Authorities to organise was the raising of a unique Armed Forces Day flag. They had requested that the flag be raised at 10.30 a.m. on Monday, 22nd June and flown during the following week. The flag would be provided free of charge by the Ministry of Defence. The Council policy on the flying of flags allowed for flags other than the Union Flag to be flown on specific occasions. For example, the Cross of Saint Patrick's was flown on 17th March, the European Union flag was flown on Europe Day on 9th May and the Red Ensign was flown on National Merchant Navy Day on 3rd September each year.

Moved by Councillor M. Browne,
Seconded by Councillor P. Maskey,

That the Committee agrees not to accede to the request and that approval for the Armed Forces Day flag to be flown at the City Hall for the period from 22nd till 29th June, 2009 be not granted.

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

Requests for the Provision of Hospitality

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

Organisation/ Body	Event / Date – Number of Delegates / Guests	Request	Comments	Recommendation
Early Years	World Forum on Early Care and Education 2009 17th June, 2009 Approximately 250 attending.	The provision of hospitality in the form of a finger buffet reception	It is estimated that 500 delegates will be staying in accommodation in Belfast and the conference will take place within the city.	The provision of a finger buffet reception. Approximate cost £2,500
Belfast County Guides	Belfast County Guides Awards Ceremony 4th June, 2009 (evening) Approximately 150 attending	Provision of hospitality in the form of a post-event drinks reception and canapés	The Girl Guide movement is an international, multi-cultural, inter-denominational organisation for young girls and women which promotes good leadership and citizenship amongst its members. This event meets the Council's Corporate Strategic Objective of Improving Quality of Life, Now and for Future Generations.	Provision of hospitality in the form of soft drinks and canapés Approximate cost £1,200

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Finance

Revenue Budget 2008/09 Outturn

The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on revenue outturn for the previous financial year and reported that this had resulted in a small surplus being achieved on estimated expenditure.

In response to a Member's question, he explained that the Council's budgetary control, including the overspend and underspend of each Department, would be considered in detail by the new Budget and Transformation Panel.

After discussion, the Committee requested that more detailed information in relation to the Council's budget, including the overspend and underspend of each Department, be included in future financial outturn reports and that the minutes of the Budget and Transformation Panel be submitted to the Committee for consideration as and when it met.

Request for Funding - Common Purpose Belfast (Bursaries)

The Committee was advised that a request for financial assistance in the sum of £4,000 had been received from Common Purpose Belfast in connection with its 2009 Navigator programme. The request concerned bursaries for course applicants who were unable to meet the participation costs. The Committee was advised that the Common Purpose programmes were designed to draw together leaders, emerging leaders and senior managers from all walks of life who could potentially play a role in shaping the future of Belfast. The Council had supported the organisation since its inception in 1996 through hosting elements of the programme, funding the participation of one Member and one officer on an annual basis and providing bursaries annually for local communities/voluntary sector applicants.

The Director of Corporate Services reported that, until the previous year, the Council had funded two bursaries. However, at its meeting on 22nd February, 2008, the Committee had declined to make available an amount of £8,450 to Common Purpose to support two full-fee and one part-fee place on its Navigator Programme. That decision had reflected pressures on the Council's resources and the fact that Common Purpose had benefited from Council support for some considerable time.

The Programme evaluation amongst Councillors and staff who had attended the Common Purpose course had concluded that they were generally highly regarded and deemed beneficial to the Council. Against this, the Committee was aware of pressures on Council resources and might wish to curtail expenditure on Common Purpose courses to Members/staff only.

In light of the above information, it was recommended that the Committee consider the following options:

- (1) accede to the request for £4,000 in respect of two part-funded places for emerging leaders in Belfast;
- (2) agree to a lesser amount of £2,000 to enable one part fee bursary to be funded; or
- (3) maintain the position which had been adopted last year whereby the Council had not supported the bursaries in view of the current budget restrictions and its existing commitments.

Moved by Councillor Kirkpatrick,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

That the Committee agrees to adopt Option (3).

On a vote by show of hands five Members voted for the proposal and five against. There being an equality of votes, the Chairman exercised her second and casting vote for the proposal and it was accordingly declared carried.

Joint Development of Staff Travel Smartcard

The Committee agreed to defer, to enable further information to be obtained, consideration of a report in relation to the joint development of a staff travel smartcard.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association Subscription and Annual Plan

The Committee considered the undernoted report in relation to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association's Annual Subscription and Annual Plan:

"1.0 Relevant background information

1.1 Members will be aware of the ongoing discussions over the past year in regards to the Council's relationship and engagement with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the concerns of Members in terms of the level of capacity within the Association, the subscription contributions sought from the Council, the value for money received and the lack of representation on NILGA's Executive.

1.2 Members will recall that the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 23rd May 2008, agreed to write to NILGA indicating that it would be willing to pay a reduced annual subscription of 76,230 (excluding VAT) for the period 2008/2009 which would be proportionate to the percentage of the Northern Ireland population rather than the £104,328 subscription charge requested by NILGA which was calculated on the basis of the penny rate product for each council.

1.3 At its meeting on 19th September 2008, the Committee had been informed that NILGA had written to the Council, dated 17th July 2008, to report that its Executive had agreed in principle to the reduced subscription fee and had set out proposals to further strengthen the Councils relationship with the Association including additional places for Belfast City Council on its Executive, the designation of a NILGA liaison officer and the provision of in-kind officer support (e.g. Legal advice, policy and research support, professional support in terms of business planning and performance management) from the Council to NILGA. The Council had provided such support to NILGA on an ad-hoc basis within the context of both sharing best practice and the Council's continued engagement within the Review of Public Administration process.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Correspondence has been received from NILGA, dated 10th March and 2nd April 2009, setting out the annual subscription proposals for the period 2009/2010, an update on NILGA's progress over the past year and an outlining the proposed Annual Business Plan for the 2009/2010 period copies of which have been circulated.

2.2 NILGA Annual Subscription for the period 2009/2010

2.2.1 On the 12th December 2008, the NILGA Executive Committee had agreed that an overall annual increase of 2.5% was required for the 2009/2010 period. However, given the current financial pressures facing local government, NILGA had agreed to waive this 2.5% increase for a one year period and therefore, it is proposed that the overall total subscription base remains the same as the 2008/2009 period. Notwithstanding this decision, the proposed annual subscription fee for Belfast City Council for the period 2009/2010 is £106,627 (exc. VAT) which is based on the penny rate product figures for each District Council area.

2.2.2 *In keeping with the previous decision taken by the Committee in regards to its subscription fee for the 2008/2009 period, correspondence has been sent to NILGA indicating that the Council's annual subscription fee should not be based on the penny rate product but rather proportionate to its population coverage which would equate to 76,230 (exc. VAT) for 2009/2010.* In addition, it is recommended that the existing arrangements whereby the Council provides in-kind support to NILGA continue for the forthcoming year, particularly within the context of the role of NILGA in supporting the RPA implementation process.

2.2.3 It is important to recognise that NILGA is firmly anchored within the established decision making machinery and implementation structures in regards to the Review of Public Administration process. NILGA facilitated the nomination process for the RPA Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels and provide Joint Secretariat support, alongside DoE officials, to these structures as well as the Regional Transition Co-ordination Group. The Joint Secretariat is contributing also to the development of policy and discussion papers which are being submitted to the SLB and PDPs for consideration. NILGA has an established internal RPA Working Group on which the Council is represented and has extended their staff complement to enable them to resource the areas of work which they are involved.

2.2.4 The embedding of a more formalised link between NILGA and the Council and a structured approach to liaison between both parties, will enable the Council to inform and somewhat shape the ongoing agenda of NILGA and help raise the bar in terms of planning and policy development within NILGA and across the wider local government sector. Accordingly, the support and advice provided by the Council to NILGA will benefit the wider local government sector.

2.3 NILGA Business Plan

2.3.1 In terms of the NILGA's proposed business plan for the period 2009/2010, there is greater emphasis and focus on the role of NILGA in supporting the local government sector within the RPA policy development and implementation process and providing secretariat and direct support to the established delivery structures including the Strategic Leadership Board and the Policy Development Panels. The key areas of activity identified include:-

- representing local government on key policy issues;
- supporting strong local government engagement in the RPA policy development process;
- supporting negotiations between central and local government on implementation issues and a resources package to support the RPA implementation;
- support the role out of an effective communications strategy;
- developing a local government RPA implementation plan; and
- bringing forward key projects to support local government e.g. a climate change package and economic recovery package.

2.4 Proposed Delivery Structures

2.4.1 NILGA has also put forward proposals for a new three tier governance structure consisting of the Full Members General Assembly which would meet 5 times a year; Executive Committee which would meet 10 times a year; and a series of Sub-Committees/Panels which are intended to refocus the

activities of the Association towards those areas of importance for local government and to facilitate broader councillor involvement in such areas of work. The proposals put forward include the established of a new:

- (i) **Strategic Policy Committee**: this would meet on a quarterly basis and focus on developing a strategic approach to policy development for local government. It is proposed that the Committee would comprise of one member from each party and the chairs of the established NILGA Policy Sub-Groups (e.g. Waste, Europe, Agriculture, Planning, Health and Environment etc). It is proposed that local government Chief Executives and senior officers would support this group.
- (ii) **People and Employment Panel**: this would meet on a quarterly basis and comprise of an amalgamation of the NIJC and JNC political groupings. The anticipated role for the new panel will be to support the development of a strategic approach to employment issues.
- (iii) **Economic Development Committee**: this would meet on a quarterly basis and comprise of 10 elected members, two from each party. It is proposed that this Committee would be supported by local government Chief Executives and officers from the Local Economic Development Forum. This remains subject to ongoing discussions between the Local Economic Development Forum and NILGA.

2.4.2 There are clearly overlaps and connections between the work to be taken forward by NILGA and the work already being undertaken by individual councils and as part of the ongoing work of the established RPA implementation structures (e.g. a Strategic Human Resources Group is to be established under the auspices of the RPA Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group to take forward HR related issues as part of the RPA process). It will be important that NILGA's work adds value and does not duplicate work already underway.

2.4.3 It is important to recognise that whilst NILGA is one key component in supporting the RPA process, local authorities (at both elected Member and officer level) are a constituent part of the process and it is important that the implementation of the RPA is 'owned' by the whole sector.

- 2.4.4 It will be important that Belfast City Council and local government generally are directly involved within the work of NILGA and, in particular, the evolving programme of work of the new Committees/Panels proposed. This is particularly important given the significant period of change ahead for local government resulting from the RPA and the need to be actively engaged within and drive this process.
- 2.4.5 Whilst the Council would welcome the engagement of local government Chief Executives and other senior officers within the proposed governance structures, it would seek further clarity as to the process through which local officers will be nominated onto such structures and the level of work which would be required in this capacity.
- 2.4.6 Members will note that in order to strengthen the relationship with constitute councils, as previously requested for by Belfast City Council, NILGA has indicated its intention to institutionalise an annual meeting between NILGA Office Bearers and Chairs/Mayors and Chief Executives of councils.
- 2.4 NILGA has offered that a delegation from NILGA would meet with councils on an individual basis to discuss any particular comments and concerns they may have in relation to any aspect of the ongoing work of NILGA and to make a presentation in relation to its planned activities and the RPA process generally.

2.5 Future role of NILGA

- 2.5.1 Members will accept that the future role and remit of NILGA post RPA is somewhat uncertain at this stage. The Council has previously documented the need for a remodelled Local Government Association which is highly attuned, responsive and accountable to its constitute Councils and which provides a coherent single voice for the local government sector within Northern Ireland. Within the context of a smaller number of constitute Councils post 2011, there is a real opportunity to develop a more focused and effective role for NILGA as the representative voice of local government. NILGA themselves have indicated that the Association would be subject to review in the lead up to the new local government structures to be put in place in 2011.

3.0 Resource Implications

Financial and Human Resources

- If the Council decides to make payment on its annual subscription fee for the period of 2009/2010 using the same formula as that applied last year (e.g. proportionate to population catchment), this will result in a payment of £76,230 (exc. VAT).

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to:

- a) note the contents of this report;
- b) agree that further clarity be sought from NILGA in regards to the intended process to be put in place to secure local government officer nominations and support for the proposed new governance structures and the level of work which would be required within this capacity; and
- c) consider the offer from NILGA to provide a briefing for Members on the proposed activities of the organisation over the forthcoming year and also on the RPA process generally.”

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Stoker,
Seconded by Councillor Rodway,

That the Committee is of the view that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association provides an inadequate level of representation to the Council and accordingly agrees not to pay to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association the subscription charge for the period 2009/10 and agrees also to withdraw from membership of the Association.

On a vote by show of hands one Member voted for the proposal and ten against and it was accordingly declared lost.

The Committee accordingly agreed:

- (l) to make payment of its annual subscription fee for the period 2009/10 using the same formula as that which had been applied in the previous year, that is, proportionate to population catchment, which would result in a payment of £76,230 (excluding VAT);

- (ii) that further clarity be sought from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association with regard to the intended process to be put in place to secure Local Government officer and Member nominations and support for the proposed new governance structures and the level of work which would be required within that capacity; and
- (iii) that consideration of the offer from the Association to provide a briefing for Members on the proposed activities of the organisation over the forthcoming year and the Review of Public Administration process generally be deferred until the aforementioned clarification had been obtained.

Authority to Seek Tenders - Various Goods and Services

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

The Committee granted authority for the commencement of tendering exercises and delegated authority to the Director of Corporate Services, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, to accept the most advantageous tenders in respect of the following:

<u>Goods/services Sought</u>	<u>Estimated Annual Value</u>	<u>Total Duration</u>
Maintenance and repair of fire alarms	£20,000	1 year + 2 optional
Metalwork and Fencing	£75,000	1 year + 2 optional
Small engineering works	£75,000	1 year + 2 optional
Glazing services (incl. callout)	£25,000	1 year + 2 optional
Maintenance and repair of intruder alarms	£20,000	1 year + 2 optional
Soft Flooring	£30,000	1 year + 2 optional
Swim Pool filtration and Ozone installations	£50,000	1 year + 2 optional
Supply of uniforms	£65,000	1 year + 2 optional
Tyres and tubes	£38,000	1 year + 2 optional
Total:	£398,000	

The Committee noted that the tenders would be evaluated using pre-determined criteria.

Authority to Seek Tender - Implementation of a Virtualised Data and Information System Infrastructure

(Ms. R. Crozier, Head of Information systems Belfast, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Council owns a large quantity of information both in the form of electronic documents and computer databases.

The Council’s documents are held within a central data repository (called a SAN) in ISB which is replicated in a backup facility at Duncrue. The SAN also holds the databases used by the Council’s email and core financial systems. The council’s SAN is now over 5 years old and is nearing end of life.

All other databases are held in a large number of data disks that are connected to or are part of the council’s collection of over 130 servers delivering all of the other information systems that the Council requires.

Most of the Council’s servers reside at ISB with a small number located at Duncrue providing backup for the email system. Additional servers are currently being installed at Duncrue to provide backup for the core finance and payroll systems.

Modern technology enables the provision of the information systems used by the Council using a significantly smaller number of servers. This technology is called server virtualisation and it delivers:

- (i) Savings arising from less power and cooling required for a smaller number of servers, and efficiencies arising from easier administration.
- (ii) Greater flexibility – computer resources can be adjusted to the required workload immediately. New or extra computer resources required can be created in minutes as opposed to the current situation where new computing devices must be procured and prepared in advance.
- (iii) Greater resilience – the Council’s systems can continue to deliver information even while experiencing certain levels of hardware failure.

A pre-requisite of implementing server virtualisation is that all of the Council's documents and databases must be held in a single central data repository (or SAN); therefore a new SAN with the capacity to hold all of the Council's data held in ISB and replicated at the backup site in Duncrue is required. This storage solution would manage the availability of information and the backup and restoration of information in as efficient a manner as possible.

Key Issues

Due to the complexity and intimate relationship between the storage and virtual server technologies, it is vital that the Council engages with a single partner who can provide a single point of contact on all matters pertaining to this work and can engage with the Council in order to plan and implement all aspects of this technology in line with the Council's business requirements.

Resource Implications

Financial

There is a capital budget in place to ensure the procurement of both the equipment and services required.

Centralised Storage

The cost of the current storage equipment if kept and maintained is £100,000 over the next 4 years. This would include the council taking on the risk of relying on an aging storage facility which will be more prone to failure with resulting service provision failure. Estimates based on indicative quotations place a new centralised storage facility supported for 4 years at £310,000 resulting in an actual cost of £210,000.

Servers

Current server maintenance costs if kept and maintained is £120,000 over next 4 years with the council again taking on the increased risk of server failure and loss of service provision. Estimates based on indicative quotations show a server replacement with 4 years support costing £250,000 resulting in an actual cost of £130,000.

Savings arising from power & cooling

It is estimated that the power and cooling costs for the current equipment in ISB is £43,000 per year.

The new equipment would reduce power and cooling costs to £8,000 per year. Over 4 years this represents a saving of £120,000. This reduces the total spend on equipment replacement to £220,000 for an infrastructure that will deliver all of the benefits described earlier.

Human Resources

While ISB staff will be heavily involved in the planning and implementation of the technology, it is vital that a council-wide engagement is done in order to ensure that business continuity arrangements for all systems in the new infrastructure are in line with the requirements of departments and sections using them.

Recommendations

Permission is sought to go to tender in order to seek a partner who will:

- (a) be a supplier of hardware (i.e. storage and servers for a virtual infrastructure)
- (b) provide ongoing maintenance support of the hardware
- (c) will help plan and implement the creation of a virtual infrastructure and the migration of the Council's information systems to the virtual infrastructure

Key to Abbreviations

SAN Storage Area Network – a centralised storage facility that is provides storage to computers and servers over the corporate network.”

The Committee granted the authority sought.

Alleygates - Term Contract

The Committee was advised that a pilot alleygating exercise, which had taken place over the previous two years in five areas of the City, that is, The Mount/Willowfield, Lower Windsor, Little Americas, Woodvale and Beechmont, had been completed successfully. The existing gates occasionally needed maintenance work to be undertaken. In addition, a capital programme proposal had been submitted for potential additional gates in other areas. Accordingly, it had been deemed appropriate to seek tenders from contractors who could undertake both schemes.

The establishment of a 3 (extendable to 4) year term agreement with a contractor would enable alleygates to be erected promptly as and when funding became available and could facilitate also the carrying out of maintenance on existing alleygates.

It was reported that the tender process had been undertaken and the submissions had been evaluated in accordance with the Council's Procurement Procedures. The evaluation had identified the most economically advantageous submission, on the basis of price and quality, as that submitted by the Red Sky Group.

The Director of Improvement reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 20th March, it had deferred consideration of the matter to enable further information to be obtained. He reported that the Legal Services Department had advised that third-party opinion should not be taken into consideration in the award of the contract by the Council as:

- the tender submissions had been evaluated in accordance with the Council's Procurement Procedures;
- the Red Sky Group had completed satisfactorily the installation of the existing pilot exercise alleygates and had previously satisfactorily undertaken other streetscape contracts for the Council; and
- failure to award the contract to Red Sky in accordance with the conditions of the tender might lead to a legal challenge.

Although a proposal for the erection of the further alleygates had been submitted for inclusion in the capital programme, no capital funding had been forthcoming and the proposal had not been approved as a "committed" project. The establishment of a term-contract would not commit the Council to any expenditure relating to the submitted proposal, but would establish a framework for advancing the necessary work as and when capital funding became available. It would provide also a mechanism for any necessary maintenance carried out on the existing alleygates, the expenditure for which would be met from revenue budgets.

Accordingly, it was recommended that the Committee approve the establishment of a term agreement with The Red Sky Group for the maintenance and erection of alleygates, subject to the completion of form of contract.

After a lengthy discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Stoker,
Seconded by Councillor Rodway,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendation.

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

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Attwood,
Seconded by Councillor C. Maskey,

That consideration of the award of the contract be deferred in order to permit the processes followed to be re-examined and that a report thereon be submitted to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

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

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.

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 Good Relations Partnership of 17th April and adopted the recommendations contained therein and in particular in relation to the following:

Peace III Small Grants: Issue of Letters of Offer

(Councillors C. Maskey, P. Maskey and Stoker declared an interest in this issue in that they were either employed by or members of the boards of one of the applicants.)

The Committee adopted the recommendation of the Partnership and granted approval to issue letters of offer for funding under the first call of the Small Grants Programme within the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan.

Specifications for the Procurement of Services under the Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan

The Committee adopted the recommendation of the Good Relations Partnership to approve the invitation of tenders for the following key actions:

<u>Key Actions</u>	<u>Indicative Budget</u> £
<u>Transforming Contested Space</u>	
2.2 Local Mediation Capacity Building Process	£180,000
2.3 Intercommunity Forum, including dialogue on removal of interfaces	£180,000
2.4 Engagement Capacity Building	£50,000
2.7 Youth Intervention Programme	180,000
<u>Shared Cultural Space</u>	
3.1 City of Festivals	100,000
3.3 Cultural Diversity in Sport	180,000

The Committee adopted also the Partnership's decision to:

- approve in principal the specifications relating to key actions within the Plan;
- note the invitations for independent members of the Partnership to observe the Tender Assessment Panel; and
- invite the Special European Union Programmes Body to send a representative to observe the Tender Assessment Panel.

The Committee noted that the contracts would be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender received based on pre-agree evaluation criteria and that the eligible project expenditure under the four themes of the Peace Plan had been included within the approved allocation of £6.3 million and could be reclaimed at 100% from the Special European Union Programmes Body.

Consultative Document

Consultation Response - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Proposed Debt Relief Scheme for Northern Ireland

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Purpose

To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee details of a consultation by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) on a proposed Debt Relief Scheme for Northern Ireland and to present a draft response to this consultation for approval.

Background

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has published a consultation document about a proposal to set up a Debt Relief Scheme in Northern Ireland. The scheme is intended to help individuals with moderate levels of unsecured debt which they cannot pay and who are unable to afford the cost of petitioning for bankruptcy. Further information, including the consultation document, is available on the Northern Ireland Insolvency Service website at – www.insolvencyservice.detini.gov.uk.

The closing date for responses to the consultation is 6th May 2009.

Members are aware that we are experiencing the toughest economic climate for over a generation and that this is a very difficult time for our ratepayers as the current economic climate is having an impact on business and households across the city. In recent weeks a substantial number of job cuts have been announced across a range of sectors with the manufacturing industry in Belfast being hit particularly hard. This will have a real impact on people across the city.

The Council has already highlighted its commitment to providing responsible leadership during these tough times and to doing what it can to help everyone in the city cope with the effects of the 'credit crunch'. Members will recall that the Council has agreed to continue to invest in our city to help provide jobs and support the economy and maintain the services that are even more important to local people now and has highlighted its commitment to supporting local communities and businesses during these uncertain times. This consultation document is therefore very timely given the current economic climate and the impact that this is having on our ratepayers.

Key Issues

Summary of the Proposed Debt Relief Scheme – Overview and key features

The scheme is intended to help individuals with moderate levels of unsecured debt which they cannot pay and who are unable to afford the cost of petitioning for bankruptcy. It will enable them to obtain an order from the Official Receiver similar to a Bankruptcy Order made by the court, but at lower cost. Important features of the scheme are –

- The individual would be protected against legal proceedings by creditors in respect of the debts listed in the Order for a one year period;
- At the end of that year their liability to repay those debts would be cancelled;
- Application to the scheme would only be possible through approved debt advice organisations;
- The individual would be subject to restrictions on taking credit or trading other than in his/her own name during the year following the making of the order. It would be possible to place those found to be culpable (e.g. as a result of financial malpractice) under continuing restrictions for up to 15 years;

- The Official Receiver would be able to revoke the Order if there is an increase in the individual's income or they acquire assets during the one year moratorium which would place them above the limits for eligibility to the scheme; and
- Once an individual had obtained a Debt Relief Order they would not be able to obtain another for a period of years.

The scheme is similar to one due to come into operation in England and Wales in April 2009.

Members are asked to note that the consultation highlights that there is potential for a very marginal impact on rates revenue as arrears of rates from private tenants, who are responsible for the payment of rates will be written off, if they obtain a Debt Relief Order. Private tenants can only be liable for the payment of rates where the capital value of the property exceeds £150,000 and where the tenancy agreement states that they are responsible. The Housing Executive pays rates for all its properties and the charge is then levied to the tenant as part of a weekly rent and rates charge. Therefore there would be no impact for rates revenue resulting from non-payment by Housing Executive tenants.

Members are asked to note that consultation on this area was previously carried out in August 2006 in connection with an attempt to have legislative provision to set up the scheme included in a Bill being made at Westminster. However due to time constraints this attempt had to be abandoned. DETI are now seeking the views of interested parties as the scheme is now being taken forward by Assembly legislation.

As a separate issue DETI are also consulting on plans to include provision in the Assembly Bill which will enable DETI to provide debt advice in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and approve the response attached at Appendix 1 to the consultation document and its submission to DETI

Key to Abbreviations

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Belfast City Council draft response to the Proposed Debt Relief Scheme for Northern Ireland consultation document

Appendix 1– Proposed Council response to the Consultation

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft *'Proposed Debt Relief Scheme for Northern Ireland'* which aims to help individuals with moderate levels of unsecured debt which they cannot pay and who are unable to afford the cost of petitioning for bankruptcy.

The consultation is very timely as we are currently experiencing the toughest economic climate for over a generation. This is a very difficult time for our ratepayers as the current economic downturn is having an impact on business and households across the city. In recent weeks a substantial number of job cuts have been announced across a wide range of sectors with the manufacturing industry in Belfast being hit particularly hard. This will have a real impact on people across the city. Figures published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in January 2009 indicated that the annual percentage rise in unemployment benefit claimants in Northern Ireland was the highest in nearly 33 years. The unemployment rate in Belfast was 4.3% in December 2008 and the Ulster Bank Chief Economist predicts that this rate will rise to 7% later in 2009.

Belfast City Council is committed to improving the quality of life and well-being of our city. We have agreed to continue to invest in our city to help provide jobs and support the economy and maintain the services that are even more important to local people now. We have highlighted our commitment to supporting local communities and businesses during these uncertain times and to doing what we can to help everyone in the city cope with the effects of the 'credit crunch'. This consultation document is therefore very apt given the current economic climate and the impact that this is having on our ratepayers.

In this instance the Council has a number of general comments to make on the content of the consultation as well as answering the consultation questionnaire (overleaf). The Council welcomes the publication of this document and in general supports the proposals in the document however the Council is disappointed to note that gym membership and sports expenses are included in the list of items that the Official Receiver describes as 'luxury' expenses (Paragraph 48 on page 17). The Council would query the inclusion of these items as 'luxury' as they are important for meeting the

objectives of the health and well-being agenda. The benefits of exercise and sporting activity, both physically and mentally, are also widely evidenced. The Council would urge that the inclusion of these items on the list of luxuries is reconsidered. Belfast City Council's Boost leisure scheme offers value for money gym membership which starts from as little as £6 per month.

The Council notes that it is highlighted that there is potential for a very marginal impact on rates revenue as arrears of rates from private tenants, who are responsible for the payment of rates will be written off, if they obtain a Debt Relief Order. The Council would seek more information about the likely impact of this.

In general, Belfast City Council is broadly supportive of the measures outlined in the consultation on 'A Proposed Debt Relief Scheme for Northern Ireland'. We have, however, made a number of comments which we would like to see reflected in the final document. We would be keen therefore to know how you intend to incorporate these and comments from other organisations who respond to your consultation into your final Strategy.

PROPOSED DEBT RELIEF SCHEME - LIST OF QUESTIONS TO CONSULTEES BELFAST CITY COUNCIL REPOSE	
1(a)	Do you think payment of a moderate fee to cover the costs of the debt relief scheme is acceptable?
	Yes
1(b)	What do you think would be a reasonable amount?
	No answer
1(c)	If you do not think a fee of any sort should be payable, do you have any suggestion as to how the scheme might be funded?
	N/A
2	Do you think entry to the scheme should be restricted to once every 6 years? If not, what length of time would be appropriate?
	Feel 6 years is appropriate
3	Do you think that use of an approved intermediary would make the system more accessible and efficient?
	Yes

4	What do you think the role of the intermediary should be?
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Providing Face to face advice 2) Filtering out of unsuitable clients 3) Confirming debtor has tried to deal with obligations 4) Helping those with literacy / numeracy problems 5) Advising debtor of requirement to disclose all assets, liabilities and income 6) Completion of forms 7) Sending off forms 8) Advising of need to review case if more problems arise 9) Advising of requirements to advise of any windfalls/ increase in income. 10) Follow up of case before the end of the Debt Relief Order to confirm circumstances unchanged
5	Do you think that some funding should be made available to the intermediaries for performing this role? If so, from what source should the funds come?
	Yes funding should be made available
6(a)	Do you think there should be a limit to the amount an individual can owe to obtain entry to the scheme?
	Yes
6(b)	Do you think that £15,000 is an appropriate cap? If not, why is this and what would an appropriate amount be?
	Yes – no higher than £15,000
6(c)	Should secured debt be included as part of the total?
	No – however some consideration may now need to be given to those people who are now in negative equity
7(a)	Do you think there should be a cap on the surplus income that is permitted before a debt relief order would be granted? Is £50 a month a realistic figure?
	Yes there should be a cap
7(b)	If £50 is not realistic, what is?
	N/A
8	Do you think that use of the Common Financial Statement would be an appropriate way to calculate surplus income? If not, why not and how would you suggest surplus income be calculated?
	Yes using the Common Financial Statement would be an appropriate way of calculating surplus income

9	Do you think that income in Debt Relief cases should be defined in the same way as income in bankruptcy cases? If not, why not, and how should income be defined?
	N/A
10	Do you think the proposed limit of £300 realisable assets is reasonable? If not what do you think a reasonable figure should be?
	N/A
11	Do you think there should be exclusions for certain property similar to those in bankruptcy?
	N/A
12	Do you think that it is right that the owner of a vehicle can keep it if he obtains a Debt Relief order provided that the vehicle is not worth more than £1,000
	The Council would then query what running costs are then reasonable to be taken into consideration – road tax /insurance /fuel/ repairs etc?
13	Do you agree that Debt Relief orders could be made administratively? If you think the court should be involved with the making of the orders, why is this?
	N/A
14	Do you think the protection offered to creditors is sufficient? If not what further steps are necessary to safeguard the position of creditors?
	N/A
15	Do you think that if a debtor makes a misrepresentation in order to obtain a debt relief order there should be enforcement action in addition to revocation of the order? If so, what type of action do you think is appropriate?
	It is important that it is made very clear by the intermediary at the beginning of the process that the debtor must provide full information both at the beginning of the process and also if their circumstances change at any time during the period of the debt relief order. They must be advised that failure to provide full information will have implications/repercussions.
16	Do you agree that individuals granted Debt Relief should be placed under continuing restrictions following discharge if there is evidence that they contributed to their insolvency by reckless or irresponsible behaviour?
	Yes - However to be equitable consideration may also have to be given to whether the creditor was reckless or irresponsible in providing credit. If the debtor is still able to get credit during the period of the Debt Relief order the use of this credit may also need to be taken into consideration.
17(a)	What action do you think should be taken if the debtor receives a windfall or experiences an increase in income?
	The debtor needs to go back to the intermediary to discuss what this means to his Debt Relief Order. There would have to be specific limits on amounts etc.

17(b)	Do you agree that if the debtor benefits from a windfall close to the date at which the debts are due to be discharged that the order should be extended to allow the debtor time to deal with the matter? If not why is this and what steps do you think should be taken to protect the position of creditors?
	Yes the period should be extended. The debtor needs to go back to the intermediary who will need to re-examine the debtor's position and the figures involved and the implications it has for the creditors. This can take time.
17(c)	What length of time do you think would constitute a reasonable period to enable the debtor to deal with his creditors?
	N/A
17(d)	Do you agree that if the debtor fails to disclose a windfall prior to discharge of the debts that the discharge should be void and creditors free to take enforcement action? If not, what action do you think should be taken?
	It might be useful if before a Debt Relief Order ends the intermediary contacts the debtor to check that his circumstances have not changed and again explains the implications of not providing information about windfalls/ increases in income"

The Committee approved the foregoing comments as the Council's response to the Department's consultation exercise.

Chairman