



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Review of the Policy and Research Unit
Date:	14 May 2008
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Relevant Background Information

The purpose of the report is to appraise the Committee of the result of the structural review of the Development Department's Policy & Research function undertaken by the Business Improvement Service.

The review follows the Interim Restructuring at which time it was agreed that Community Services, Sports Events, The Waterfront and Ulster Halls would move into the Development Department. A report was submitted to the Development Committee on 13 June 2007 in relation to the 'change management process' which addressed the need for re-structuring several units within the Department.

The restructuring resulted in two policy teams existing within the Departmental structure with one in Community Services and one in Directorate. No policy support was available for Waterfront and Ulster Halls in the revised structure. In order to streamline these structures and ensure consistency of approach throughout the whole Department in terms of policy and research, an in-depth review was undertaken of the two units to examine the most appropriate structure and staffing arrangements for the function within the Department. This was needed in order to improve and maximise the impact of the policy and research function throughout the whole Department.

The objectives of the report were set in consultation with the Director of Development. A number of stakeholders were consulted in relation to the review. A benchmarking plan was developed which incorporated a range of best in practice public sector organisations both within Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK. BIS analysed the information gathered from the consultations, benchmarking and other research and made recommendations as to the best approach for the policy and research function in the Development Department.

Key Issues

As a result of interim restructuring within the Council, a number of units were relocated in the Development Department. Due to the realignment of these Council structures the Development Department has been left with staff dispersal with regards to policy related activities whereas previously they had been located centrally. Also some of the new functions in the Department had no policy support. It is therefore clear from the impacts of the interim restructuring that the current policy structures no longer meet the needs of this new Development Department.

Posts which are dedicated to policy and research are located in both the Directorate and the Community Services Section.

The Directorate Policy and Research Unit currently comprises the following posts:

- Development Policy & Research Manager
- 2 Policy and Research Officers (Fixed Term Contract) (vacant)
- Communication and Information Officer
- Industrial Placement (Communication)
- Industrial Placement (Economics and Research)

The Community Services Section comprises of three posts:

- Policy and Support Manager (vacant)
- Policy and Research Officer
- Events and Marketing Officer (vacant)

The Policy and Research Officer is the only post currently filled and since the interim restructuring, this post has been operating from the Directorate Policy and Research Unit.

The work of the Department has expanded considerably since the interim restructuring increasing from approximately 150 to 500 staff, with each individual unit requiring support from the Policy and Research Unit. This includes strategy and policy formulation and development as well as research and business planning activities. This has resulted in an increased workload and a widened knowledge requirement for the Policy and Research Unit.

The consultations revealed a need for a continued, integrated approach and consistency in relation to policy and performance related activities. There was a clear view that there should be a single point where policy, strategy and performance management for the Department is coordinated to provide a committed, consistent and integrated approach consistent with the new Departmental structures.

Resource Implications

Human Resources

The current split of the policy function across two teams does not make best use of the policy and research resources, as it does not provide support to all areas of the Department and may lead to duplication of effort and approach. It is important that the Policy and Research Unit should remain a central resource to ensure an integrated approach and consistency in relation to policy and performance related activities. This means that the Department as a whole can utilise the resource, knowledge and skill base of the Policy and Research Unit.

BIS recommend that the two units be amalgamated and streamlined into one Policy Unit that would service and provide support from a central team to the whole Department. To provide a more successful operation and solve the problem of the increased remit of duties they also recommend reallocating some of the posts to create a robust staffing structure for the Policy and Research Unit.

BIS recommend the following:

- That the title of the Policy and Research Unit be amended to the Policy and Business Development Unit.
- That the title of Policy and Research Manager is amended to Policy and Business Development Manager. BIS have amended the job description to embrace the additional duties identified. A job evaluation has indicated a scale of PO8.
- That the Policy and Research Officers (Fixed Term) title is amended to Policy and Business Development Officers and the posts be made permanent to provide adequate support and deliver quality work identified above and the current job description be amended to include the additional duties. BIS have amended the job description to embrace the additional duties and Departmental remit. A job evaluation has indicated a salary scale of PO4.
- That the post of Policy and Research Officer, which is currently in the Community Services Section structure, should be re-designated as a Policy and Business Development Officer and that the post-holder sign up to the proposed generic job description of PO4.
- That two generic posts of Policy and Business Development Assistant be created in order to meet current demands. BIS have created a job description to embrace the duties identified and a job evaluation indicates a salary scale of SO2.
- The duties and responsibilities of the communications strand (Communications Officer and Industrial Placement-Communications) will remain unchanged until the outcome of a further review within the Department is known.
- That the post of Policy and Support Manager (PO9), Community Services Section, be deleted.
- That the Industrial Placement post responsible for Economics and Research be deleted.
- That the budgetary allocation for the Events and Marketing Officer Scale 6 (Community Services – currently vacant) be used to offset the cost of new posts in the Department.

Financial Implications

The cost of the re-designation of the Policy and Research Officers (Fixed Term) to permanent Policy and Business Development Officers has already been factored into the financial planning cycle by the Department. It has been planned from 2004 in the Medium Term Financial Plan and presented as growth, in the Revenue Estimate process, to both the Development and the Strategic Policy and Resource Committees respectively and subsequently ratified by Council in January and February 2008.

The proposed restructuring which amalgamates the two units into one central streamlined resource would result in a saving of £6,000 per annum.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

1. Note the content of the BIS Review of the Policy and Research Unit
2. Agree to the change in title for the Unit and posts from Policy and Research to Policy and Business Development.
3. Agree the re-evaluated scale of PO8 for the Policy and Business Development Manager.
4. Agree to the recruitment of two Policy and Business Development Officers.
5. Note the re-designation of the Community Services Policy and Research Officer.
6. Agree to the creation of and recruitment of two generic posts of Policy and Business Development Assistants.
7. Note the deletion of the post of Policy and Support Manager, Community Services
8. Note the deletion of the post of Industrial Placement, Economics and Research.