



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee Work Plan and Key Issues
Date:	20 February 2009
Reporting Officer:	Chief Executive, Peter McNaney
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Purpose of the Report

To set out the work programme of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee over the next two months and outline some of the key issues to be addressed.

Key Issues

The Standing Orders of the Council set out the main purposes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and these can be summarised as follows:

1. Co-ordination and creation of policy (Corporate Plan).
2. Creation and control of the Council's programme of prioritised activities (Corporate Plan).
3. Referee and controller of the Council's major resource allocation processes (Revenue Budget and capital programme).
4. Direct service responsibility for corporate functions such as Finance, Audit Governance and Risk, Human Resources, Communication, ISB, Legal Services and asset management, including land and property.
5. Performance Management
6. The rules of engagement (standing orders and financial regulations)
7. Transition Committee for RPA

Co-ordination and creation of policy

Essentially, the Committee has responsibility for setting the overall ***direction of travel*** for the organisation as a whole. This is an acceptance that the Council is greater than an amalgam of services and needs to have a broader strategic framework within which to operate. The essential parts of this framework are the ***vision, mission and values*** for the organisation. These have already been agreed by the Council as part of the corporate planning process.

As part of the corporate plan, the Council has also agreed a set of ***strategic priorities which are*** :

- The local economy
- The environment
- Better support for people and communities
- Better Services
- Better leadership
- Better value for money

These strategic priorities will require policy and strategy development which will be cross-cutting in nature as they will impact on more than one service or department in terms of service delivery and resources. A separate report, which is on today's agenda, will recommend a policy framework which will help support the Committee ensure that there is a more robust and consistent approach to developing policy and strategy in the Council.

Creation and control of the Council's programme of prioritised activities

The objectives and priorities of the Council as agreed in the corporate plan cover a three year period. One of the key roles of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is to agree the shorter term priorities for the forthcoming year. These priorities are then incorporated into the service and departments business plans.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be requested to agree the priority actions for 2009/10 at its second meeting in April.

Members should also note that for the first time the Council has created a corporate thematic priorities budget. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be required to decide on the allocation of this budget for 2009/10 at its second meeting in April.

Resource Allocation

One of the key roles of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is to recommend to Council the level of revenue and capital resources which will be available to spend in a given year and also how these resources should be allocated across departments and committees. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee then monitors the revenue budget and capital programme spending throughout the year. The committee may also need to recommend remedial action when required to bring spending back on track.

In terms of 2009/10 the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has already recommended a district rate to the Council and the budget allocations for individual committees. A report on the capital programme 2009/10 will be brought to committee in March 2009.

As part of the budget setting process Members have recognised the limitations of a one year planning cycle in terms of only being able to amend budgets at the margins. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has agreed to establish a Budget and Transformation Panel which will examine ways of developing a three year budget cycle. This work will require significant change to the financial management arrangements in the Council and will include:

- The development of a Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The development of a revised Capital Financing Strategy.
- The development of a Transformation Programme to deliver further cash savings.
- The development of a Service Level Agreement with Land and Property Services to ensure collectable rate income is maximised.
- A comprehensive review of budgets across the Council.

A report on the creation of the Budget and Transformation Panel will be brought to committee in March 2009. Members have already agreed that the Panel will require support from an independent source in terms of validation and challenge. Approval is now being sought from Members for officers to go ahead and identify this external source so that a recommendation can be made to committee in March 2009.

Members are reminded that they had previously sought assurances on how the organisation can best employ effective control over staff numbers. A report on this matter will be brought to committee in March 2009.

Direct responsibility for corporate functions

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has direct responsibility for as Financial Services, Audit Governance and Risk, Human Resources, Communication, ISB, Legal Services and asset management, including land and property. The central processes associated with these functions act as glue which holds the organisation together. Members are keenly aware that the corporate core must be as efficient as possible and for this reason it was agreed to independently review the centre of the organisation. The first phase of the work is nearing completion and a report making recommendations for changes to structures, potential efficiency savings and an implementation plan will be brought to committee in March for consideration.

Strategies and frameworks have already been agreed for most of the functional areas and the outstanding ones – Communications, ICT and Customer Focus will be brought to committee in March 2009 for consideration.

Performance Management

Whilst the individual service Committees take responsibility for the performance of services reporting directly to them, the Policy and Resources Committee has overall responsibility for the performance of the Council.

In support of this scrutiny role and to enable Members to hold officers to account for delivery, the organisation has developed a suite of performance indicators which have been agreed by Members as part of the corporate planning process. The indicators link directly to the corporate plan and Council priorities. An automated performance management system is also being developed which will provide Members with better access to performance information.

Performance management is one of the less evolved roles of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Given the increasing pressure on the Council to demonstrate value for money it is important that Members are properly equipped to fulfil their performance management responsibilities. For this reason training in this area will be given priority as part of the Member Development Programme. Once this training is complete, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will receive quarterly reports on corporate performance.

A more detailed report on performance management in the Council will be brought to the committee in April 2009.

The rules of engagement

The full Council has overall responsibility for the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, but it falls to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to enforce the regulations and to act to ensure that the Council conducts its affairs within the statutory and regulatory framework, but also with in its own operating criteria.

Officers are currently developing a revised Constitution for the Council and this will be brought to the Committee in April for consideration.

Transition Committee for RPA

This is a new role for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and a paper is on today's agenda which outlines the work of the Committee in this area.

Recommendations

Members are requested to agree the following:

1. To note the key issues which the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be asked to address over the coming months.
2. Officers to start the process of securing the independent member of the Budget and Transformation Panel.
3. To note the improvement work being done to better support the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee fulfil its roles and responsibilities.
4. To consider the following reports:

March 2009

- a. Capital programme 2009/10.
- b. The creation of the Budget and Transformation Panel.
- c. Control of staff numbers.
- d. Review of the centre.
- e. Communications, ICT and Customer Focus strategies.

April

- a. Corporate Plan – 2009/10 priorities.
- b. Allocation of corporate thematic priorities budget 2009/10.
- c. Performance Management update.
- d. Constitution of the Council.