Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	**Corporate Frameworks – Policy Framework**
Date:	20 February 2009
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
Contact Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Strategic Policy Manager

Context and Relevant Background Information

Members have previously agreed a number of corporate frameworks that had been developed to support the implementation and management of the Council's corporate plan 2008 – 2011.   These cover key internal processes including finance, performance, human resources, information management and assurance. The purpose of this report is to present for approval the Policy Framework.

Key issues

A robust policy framework is critical to effective corporate governance, as it is through policy and strategy that the Council translates its vision and purpose into actions. Policy decisions must be appropriate to need, reflect resource constraints and organisational capacity, and be informed by a sound evidence base. The policy framework, therefore, seeks to formalise and strengthen the governance and skills sets necessary for effective policy-making. It is a key corporate and management process and is essential to achieving a joined-up, "one-Council" approach where decisions are aligned to corporate priorities and deliver efficient, effective outcomes which assures the best use of limited resources.

Current Situation

The Council's Standing Orders state that Strategic Policy and Resources shall be the Council's main instrument of policy and is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Council and its corporate priorities through the development of a Corporate Plan.

Obviously much of the policy making in the Council is quite properly devolved to departments and their service committees. This is right and proper and should continue. However the current financial climate and the drive to integrate service delivery across the organisation for the benefit of the citizen require the resource and implementation consequences of major policies to be considered by Strategic Policy and Resources. This will allow the Committee to ensure that the use of resources is maximised, activities are co-ordinated, key implementation issues are addressed and performance maintained. A policy framework, which includes a central coordination function, has therefore been developed to improve strategic integration, determine resource consequences and allow joined-up planning and delivery and is attached at appendix 1.

Aims of the Policy Framework

The purpose of the policy framework is to improve coordination and to support a more robust and consistent approach to developing policy and strategy. The Framework is deigned to:

- Clarify roles, responsibilities and requirements in relation to all levels of policy and strategy
- Provide a systematic, evidence-based approach to policy making, ultimately leading to better decisions
- Provide structured support and challenge where applicable
- Improve internal coordination and alignment between strategy, policy and implementation
- Improve resource management
- Improve the monitoring and accountability of Council policy and strategy

The key stages in the policy framework are set out overleaf.

<u>The Policy Framework</u>

Process	Report to
Stage 1: Policy / Strategy Initiation: <u>Purpose</u>: To notify Council (corporately) of the intention to develop or review a strategy or policy to enable early consideration of possible corporate impacts, coordination and resource implications.	COMT Notification to SP&R and authorisation
Stage 2: Policy / Strategy Development Phase: <u>Purpose</u>: To ensure policy and strategy is developed in a robust and consistent manner in accordance with legislative requirements and which adheres to good practice (evidence base, consultation, action planning and linkages to performance management etc), thereby minimising the risk of poor policy decisions and implementation failure. A checklist has been developed to assist Services with the stage.	Regular update reports as necessary to COMT and SP&R
Stage 3: Corporate Alignment and Assessment: <u>Purpose</u>: To enable COMT to assess the draft policy or strategy to ensure internal alignment, resource requirements and ongoing implementation issues are identified for Members' consideration.	COMT
Stage 4: Council Evaluation and Approval <u>Purpose</u>: To enable Members to assess and evaluate the draft policy or strategy and to make the decision on whether to adopt.	SP&R or service Committee as appropriate
Implementation	Performance Management Framework
Monitoring	
Review	

<u>Policy Framework - Summary</u>

- The framework proposes a clear challenge and control role through Members (SP&R or departmental Committee as appropriate) formalising and structuring current practice.

- In the first instance, COMT will be responsible for identifying and assessing any corporate or resource implications arising from proposed policy and strategy for Members' consideration and to ensure strategic alignment and fit.

- All significant policy and strategy will be then brought to Members, at project initiation stage for direction and again for final ratification. Regular update reports will also be brought to Members as required or necessary.

- The framework differentiates between operational and 'cross-cutting' policy, with different governance and coordination arrangements required for each. Further work will be required in collaboration with Departments and Members to define what is meant by cross-cutting policy.

- Internal alignment would be achieved through a central coordination function, which in the interim structure, would be provided through CIT. CIT would therefore be responsible for administrating and coordinating the framework in collaboration with services and departments.

- One of the common reasons policy and strategy fail to meet all their expected outcomes is because implementation has not been properly assessed, monitored or evaluated. The policy framework requires that implementation is considered as part of the policy development process. In addition, the procedures being developed to support the policy framework introduce a rigorous approach to action planning, performance management and review, and reflect the Council's improvement agenda. This will also ensure that performance information is considered at an early stage and, where appropriate, incorporated into the Council's performance management system.

Processes and Procedures

It is important that the Council has a shared understanding of what is meant by policy and strategy and the processes involved. More work will be done to agree definitions, particularly as the terms policy and strategy tend to be interpreted differently across the Council and are often used inter-changeably. Linkages and implications for Scheme of Delegation will also be explored.

Work is continuing to agree the processes and procedures needed centrally and across Department to meet the framework. As part of the implementation of the framework, it is proposed that a monitoring pro-forma and/or an annual departmental policy schedule be introduced. Within some Departments, work is already underway to develop Departmental Policy Schedules; and it is proposed that this could form the basis of the internal notification process. Other local authorities use a pro-forma or monitoring form approach and this in another possibility that is being considered, particularly in relation to emerging issues.

A checklist based on recommended 'good policy making' and good practice, is being developed to be used by Departments and Services as a guide when developing policy and strategy. This includes key steps such as collecting the evidence base, consulting with stakeholders and evaluating internal and external impacts. Process links to customer care and the proposed consultation and engagement strategy will be developed.

The framework will be coordinating centrally (currently through CIT) and it is intended that a central repository and use of IT and will be developed to make it easier to access policy and strategy information and for Members and COMT to fulfil their monitoring and evaluation role.

Resource Implications

The policy framework is intended to provide a robust and integrated approach to decision making and resource allocation, thereby delivering efficiencies across the organisation. However, implementing the framework may require skills development and a reconfiguration of existing resources; this will be assessed as part of the review of the centre. A small budget may be required to purchase or develop a central repository or policy database for the Council; however, this could be met from within the CIT budget.

Decision Required

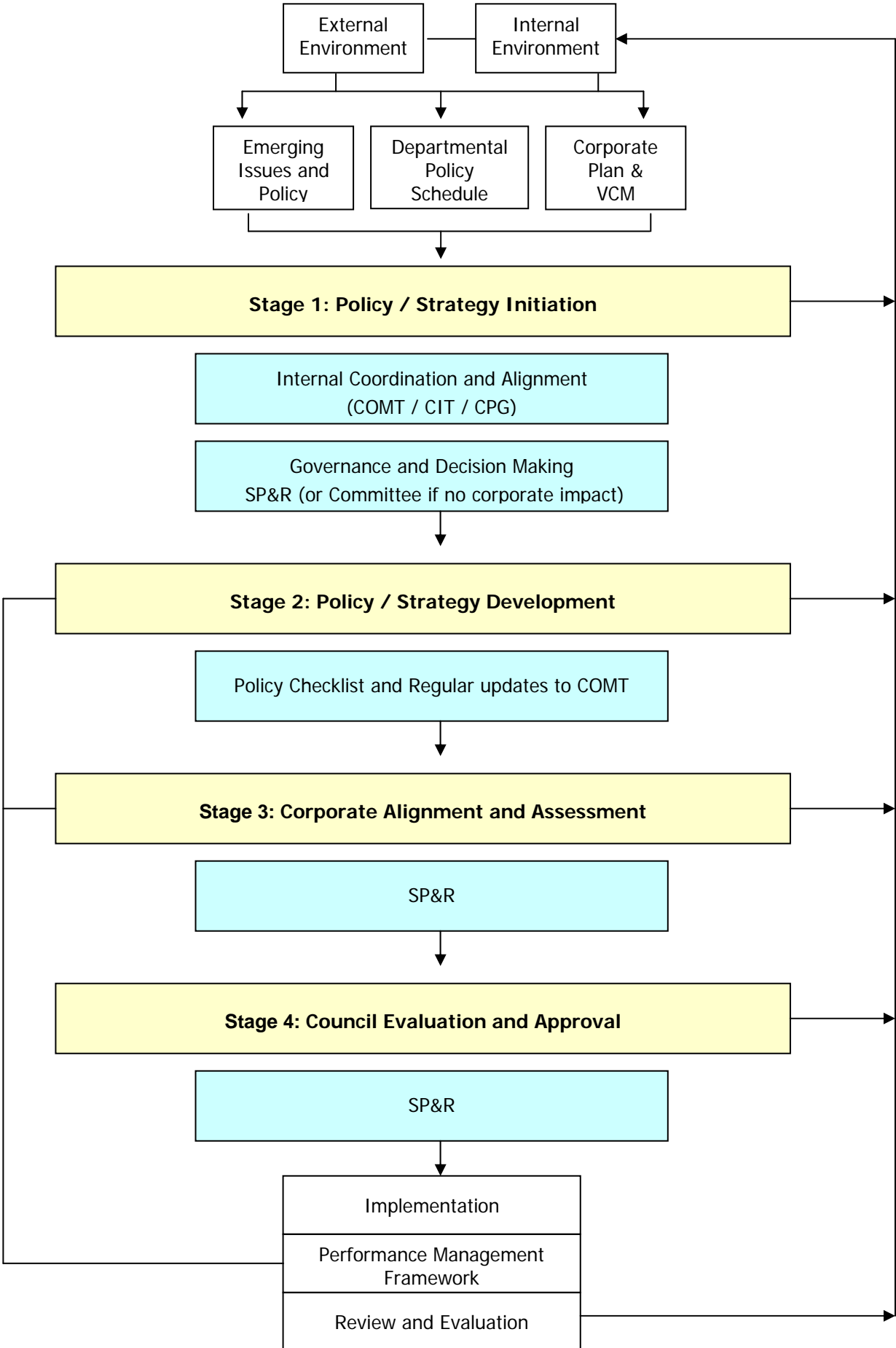Member are asked to note the contents of the report and to agree the components of the Policy Framework

Abbreviations

Documents Attached

Appendix 1   Integrated Policy Framework

This page has been intentionally left blank.

Integrated Policy Framework:

```
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│     External     ├───┤     Internal     │◄──────────────────┐
│   Environment    │   │   Environment    │                   │
└────────┬─────────┘   └────────┬─────────┘                   │
         │                      │                             │
    ┌────┴────┬─────────────────┼─────────────────┐           │
    ▼         ▼                 ▼                 ▼            │
┌─────────┐ ┌────────────┐ ┌────────────┐                     │
│Emerging │ │Departmental│ │ Corporate  │                     │
│Issues and│ │  Policy    │ │  Plan &    │                     │
│ Policy  │ │  Schedule  │ │    VCM     │                     │
└─────────┘ └────────────┘ └────────────┘                     │
```

Stage 1: Policy / Strategy Initiation ──────────────►

Internal Coordination and Alignment
(COMT / CIT / CPG)

Governance and Decision Making
SP&R (or Committee if no corporate impact)

Stage 2: Policy / Strategy Development ──────────────►

Policy Checklist and Regular updates to COMT

Stage 3: Corporate Alignment and Assessment ──────►

SP&R

Stage 4: Council Evaluation and Approval ──────────►

SP&R

Implementation

Performance Management Framework

Review and Evaluation ─────────────────────────────────►

This page has been intentionally left blank.