



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Fixed-Term Working Groups
Date:	3rd June, 2011
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (extension 6314)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer (extension 6313)

Relevant Background Information

Members may recall that, in adopting the Council's Governance Arrangements in 2007, it was acknowledged that the Standing Committees would wish to appoint short-term Working Groups to focus on issues of particular relevance. In addition, the Council had agreed previously to adopt the following principles in appointing Working Groups:

- Working Groups should be established only if they are considered to be essential for the achievement of effective and efficient decision-making;
- such Working Groups should be appointed only for a fixed-term and for a specific purpose;
- the Groups would not have decision-making powers but rather would produce a report with recommendations for consideration by the appointing Committee;
- after the Working Group has fulfilled its remit it would cease to exist; and
- Working Groups should be formed on the basis of All-Party representation with nominees sought from the leaders of the Political Parties.

Key Issues

The range of Working Groups, which had been established during the previous Council term, ceased to exist on 5th May, coinciding with the Local Government Elections. Therefore, it is now a matter for the Committee to consider whether it wishes to reconstitute the following groups whose remit falls under the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee:

1. Accommodation Steering Group

Established by Policy and Resources Committee on 19th January, 2007, this Group's original remit was to oversee the arrangements for the refurbishment of the City Hall. Since the completion of the work to the City Hall, meetings of this Group have been called periodically by the Director of Property and Projects to address staff and Political Party accommodation issues. In particular the Group's remit is as follows:

- to consider and advise upon future occupancy and accommodation requirements at the City Hall / Cecil Ward Building / Adelaide Exchange, together with outlying Council properties, and, in the case of the City Hall, in regard to public access and facilities; and
- to act as a communication channel to Political Parties and Members in general and ensure that issues regarding accommodation issues are fully understood.

Previous Membership

One representative from each Political Party.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted, it will meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Director of Property and Projects.

2. Audit Panel

The purpose of Audit Panel, which was established by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 20th April, 2007, is to provide impartial assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. It meets on a quarterly basis and provides independent scrutiny for the Council's financial and non-financial performance and highlights areas of concern which exposes the Council to risk and weakens the control environment. The Panel also oversees the Council's annual financial accounting process.

Previous Membership

One representative from each Political Party Grouping together with an external member appointed by the Council.

Anticipated Life Span

It is anticipated that this Panel, if reconstituted, will meet on a quarterly basis throughout the Council term under the guidance of the Director of Finance and Resources.

The first meeting of this Working Group has been scheduled for 1.00 p.m. on 9th June as it will be required to review the Annual Accounts prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

3. Belfast Flooding Members' Group

This Working Group was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd January, 2009, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations within the Belfast Flooding Report 2008. It seeks to work with other bodies and agencies to put in place prevention measures to address the risk of future flooding across the City. Its remit is at follows:

- to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the Council's 2008 Belfast Flooding Report;
- to provide political influence and leadership for stakeholders and partners involved in flood work in Belfast; and
- to support community engagement in flood work in Belfast

Previous Membership

One representative from each Political Party.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted it will meet on an ad hoc basis (normally monthly) under the guidance of the Director of Health and Environmental Services.

4. Budget and Transformation Panel

This Panel was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 6th February, 2009. Its aims and objectives, as set out below, outline the objectives of the Panel, its deliverables, manner of working, governance arrangements and programme of work:

Overall Objective

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

Detailed Objectives

- to provide political support in terms of Political Parties and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the delivery of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda;
- to scrutinise the alignment of the Council's efficiency and transformation agenda to corporate priorities;
- to support the development and implementation of the Council's efficiency and transformation programme;
- to hold officers to account for the delivery of an agreed efficiency and transformation programme;
- to track and monitor the achievement of agreed financial savings; and
- to provide an overview of the Council's finances.

Previous Membership

Leaders of each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted, it will meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Director of Finance and Resources.

5. City Investment Strategy Working Group

This Group, which was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd October, 2010, seeks to address and manage the Council's budgetary constraints within the current challenging economic conditions. Accordingly, the Group works to ensure that the Council fulfils its obligation to retain its vision of strategic, equitable and sustainable development across the City. To this end, the Group seeks to engage with key stakeholders and to lobby Ministers at the Northern Ireland Assembly to focus and drive investment and resources to Belfast.

Previous Membership

Chairmen of Strategic Policy and Resources and Development Committees plus one representative from each of the other Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Given the current economic climate, it is recommended that Group be reconstituted for the forthcoming Council term and meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Director of Property and Projects.

6. Cross-Party Reference Group on Community Planning

The Group reports on all issues affecting the future direction of Community Planning in Belfast which will be taken by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The purpose of the Reference Group is to support, influence, monitor and challenge the development of community planning in Belfast and related projects. Specifically, the Reference Group works:

- to provide strategic direction to the Belfast Community Planning Consortium (BCPC) - which is responsible for overseeing the BIG Lottery funded community planning pilot project;
- to ensure the BCPC and BIG Lottery Community Planning Project is connected to the political process;
- to monitor the progress of the BIG Lottery Community Planning Project and contribute to the evaluation of the project;
- to provide strategic / political direction and input to the development of the health planning process within Belfast.
- to assess the learning for Belfast City Council and its implications for the ongoing development of community planning within Belfast;
- to act as a reference panel in the wider development of the Council's community planning framework;
- to make recommendations to Strategic Policy and Resources regarding the developing community planning framework for Belfast. This may include recommendations on timelines, resources and

structures;

- to champion a cohesive approach within the Council to Community Planning; and
- to develop and maintain expertise in the field of community planning.

Previous Membership

Two representatives from each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted, it will meet on a monthly basis under the guidance of the Director of Health and Environmental Services.

7. Good Relations Partnership

The Good Relations Partnership, which was established by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 17th August, 2001, has overseen the development of a Good Relations Strategy, the establishment of a Good Relations Unit and has made recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee on a range of issues, as well as the awarding of grant-aid, including substantial amounts of European funding via the Peace III Programme. The terms of reference for the Good Relations Partnership are set out below:

- to promote equality of opportunity in the discharge of the Council's responsibilities, taking into account the needs of persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, of men and women generally, of persons with a disability and persons without and of persons with dependants and persons without;
- to promote tolerance and understanding throughout the City by providing support, including the equitable use of available budgets, for appropriate initiatives which celebrate the cultural diversity of Belfast;
- to promote good relations between people of different religious and political beliefs and different racial groups in every aspect of Council activities; and
- to use the Council's influence as a democratically elected body, providing civic leadership to the City, to promote good relations throughout society.

Membership and Anticipated Life Span

The Good Relations Partnership, if reconstituted, will consist of one Member from each Political Party, together with 16 external Members and will meet on a monthly basis. In view of its current value to the Council and its potentially greater role in relation to the delivery of the Peace III funding within Belfast, it is recommended that the Good Relations Steering Panel be reconstituted and continue to meet on a monthly basis over the current Council term.

The first meeting of the Group is scheduled for 12.00 noon on Monday 6th June as it is required to consider the award of Summer Intervention Funding.

8. Memorabilia Working Group

The Council's representatives on the Good Relations Partnership serve also on the Memorabilia Working Group. This Group, which was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 14th November, 2008, considers issues regarding memorabilia, language, civic ceremonies and events within the City Hall and the City Hall grounds.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted for the forthcoming Council term, it will meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Good Relations Manager.

9. Historic Centenaries Working Group

This Group was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 10th December, 2010, to oversee the Council's approach to the forthcoming decade of centenaries. Its terms of reference are as follows:

- to consider historic centenaries and commemorations which the Council might wish to consider marking over the next decade
- to establish a core set of principles to be applied in considering those centenaries and in identifying appropriate events to be commemorated
- to consider what actions the Council might wish to take itself, carry out with others or support the celebrations of others in the marking of those centenaries
- to give consideration to how a budget might be developed to support any actions agreed
- to make recommendations to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee regarding the issues above.

Previous Membership

One representative from each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted, it will meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Good Relations Manager.

10. Housing Forum

This Forum, which was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources on 15th June, 2007, replaced the Council's former Housing Liaison. Given the significant amount of time which Members spend dealing with housing matters, it was felt appropriate that the Council would maintain formal links with the Housing Executive through a Housing Forum. The Forum provides an opportunity for Members to develop partnerships with officials from the Executive and also a platform to discuss and/or resolve many of the issues relating to housing problems faced by their constituents.

It is therefore proposed that the Housing Forum be re-established for the forthcoming Council term and that membership be extended to all Members. The Town Planning Committee would continue to receive the annual District Housing Plans for the Belfast Area. The terms of reference for the Forum are set out hereunder:

- to receive quarterly updates on the progress of the New Build Social Housing Programme;
- to receive reports on the Physical Programme, including annual cyclical maintenance; and
- to deal with any other Housing-related issues which the Members might wish to raise with Housing officials.

Previous Membership

All Members of the Council.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Forum be reconstituted, invitations to attend quarterly meetings will be extended to all Members of the Council.

11. Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group was first established by the former Members' Sub-Committee on 12th March, 2007, under the following terms of reference:

- to align the Member development strategy to the value creation map;
- to oversee the processes for the identification of development needs at individual, Party Group and Council-wide levels;
- to ensure the appropriate implementation of the Member Development Strategy and associated policies;
- to adopt a structured and timely approach to promoting Member development opportunities;
- to recommend best practice in other Local Authorities which Members can learn from and share with external partners;
- to facilitate Member development activity;
- to develop mechanisms for the evaluation of Member development activities; and
- to review, update and revise the Member development strategy at appropriate levels to ensure that it continues to address the development needs of Members.

Previous Membership

One representative from each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

It is recommended that this Group be reconstituted. It will oversee the implementation of the Members' Development Strategy, including Personal Development Plans for Members, a revised and enhanced Induction Programme and core development activities.

12. New Regional Hospital for Women and Children Working Group

This Working Group was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 12th December, 2009. Its remit is to oversee a campaign and to lobby for the establishment in Belfast of a new regional hospital for children and women. In addition, the following Notice of Motion was passed unanimously by the Council at its meeting on 1st July, 2009:

“Belfast City Council calls on the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Northern Ireland Executive to make the completion of the new regional hospital for children and women, on the site of the Royal Group of Hospitals, a matter of top priority in the next comprehensive spending review. The Council calls on the Minister of Health and the Executive to secure the resources now for clearing the site, which is an essential first step in progressing the new hospital for children and women. The Council agrees to work in partnership with the Royal Maternity Hospital Liaison Group to lobby the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to secure the capital funds necessary to build the new regional hospital for children and women.’

Previous Membership

One representative from each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Given the previous Health Minister’s decision in relation to the hospital, this Group has not met since December, 2009. therefore, it is recommended that it does not be reconstituted.

13. North Foreshore Steering Group

This Group was established by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 18th May, 2010. Its remit is to oversee the management of the North Foreshore, especially in regard to policy, resource allocation and financial risk of future development at the site

Previous Membership

The previous Steering Group held its first meeting on 16th December, 2010. This meeting was attended by the Chairmen of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Parks and Leisure Committee, the Health and Environmental Committee and the Development Committee. At that meeting it was agreed that membership of the Steering Group would be extended to include Councillors from the Castle and Oldpark District Electoral Areas (14 Members in total).

Anticipated Life Span

Given the importance of political governance and direction in the development of major Council projects, such as the North Foreshore, it is recommended that Group be reconstituted for the forthcoming Council term and that it meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Director of Property and Projects.

14. Reference Group on Older People

The Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 21st April, 2006, established an All-Party Reference Group on Older People. The Group is supported by the Head of Environmental Health with policy input from the Corporate Policy Unit. The Group was set-up to engage directly with other agencies, including those in the voluntary sector and its role is to:

- to consider the potential future strategic direction of the Council’s work on older people to inform the development of the Council’s Corporate

Strategy and Plan;

- to explore improve methods of maximising the impact which the Council could have in working with other partners to meet older people's needs;
- to work with Belfast Healthy Cities on developing the Council's input to the Intersectoral Plan;
- to have an overseeing role in respect of the Intersectoral Plan on Older People and an advocacy role; and
- to consider the services provided currently by the Council for older people.

Previous Membership

One representative from each of the Political Parties.

Anticipated Life Span

Should this Group be reconstituted, it will meet on an ad hoc basis under the guidance of the Head of Environmental Health.

Resource Implications

There are no financial or Human Resources implications associated with this report.

Recommendations

- The Committee is asked to consider which, if any, of the Working Groups it wishes to reconstitute and the membership of each of the Groups.
- The Committee may also wish to consider, given the number of Working Groups, whether or not to combine the work of some of the Groups.

Decision Tracking

Officer Responsible: Mr. Jim Hanna (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Timescale: A letter will be forwarded to each of the Party Leaders following the meeting to seek representation on each of the Groups which are reconstituted.