



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Future work plan
Date:	Friday, 7 October, 2011
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 17 June, considered that the review of the current Corporate Plan and the development of priorities and projects for the new Corporate Plan should commence in August/September through a series of party briefings and facilitated workshops for Members. The timetable for the development of the new Plan would then become aligned with the timetable for the development of the Council's medium-term financial plan and the setting of the rate for 2012/13.</p>
1.2	<p>The purpose of the Workshops would be to seek agreement on what Members wished to achieve by the end of the Council term and to consider how this could be delivered in the context of available resources. Among the issues which Members would consider during the next three months would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition – what the Council would deliver across the City in terms of both projects and programmes; • Advocacy – where and how to influence on behalf of the City; • Affordability – what was achievable and realistic; • Delivery – understanding what it took to get things from concept to delivery and making sure things happened; and • Governance – ensuring effective decision-making and clarifying the roles of Members and officers in achieving the priorities.
1.3	<p>The first workshop, held on 17 August, incorporated two sessions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Place-shaping' and potentially "game-changing" projects that Members wanted to see delivered in Belfast on a NSEW and City Centre basis. 2. Consideration of the Council's Corporate Themes – leadership, economy, environment, people and communities and improving services.

1.4	Subsequently, on 23 September, the Committee considered a report which outlined the direction given by Members at the workshop to inform the development of the Corporate Plan 2012-15 and an 'investment package' which would communicate the Council's Commitment to tackling the effects of the economic downturn in the city.
1.5	The second workshop, held on 28 September, aimed to foster an understanding of 'city competitiveness' and incorporated a presentation by Neil Gibson of Oxford Economics who outlined the challenges and opportunities facing Belfast and proposed what the Council may consider in supporting the economic growth of the city. The findings of the workshop will be used to inform the second iteration of the 'Belfast Investment Package 2011' Document.
1.6	Furthermore, area based working sessions have been scheduled to take place over the coming weeks in advance of the next meeting of the Budget and Transformation Panel. These sessions, will aim to build upon discussions among Members at the recent Place-Shaping workshop. The briefing sessions will enable Members to further discuss and refine the projects and priorities previously identified.
1.7	Members will be aware that there are quite a few meetings, workshops and other sessions being arranged in order to complete a draft Corporate Plan as well as informing the striking of the rate. A work plan is enclosed as Appendix 1 which aims to outline upcoming issues and when they will be considered.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Through the workshops Members have stressed the need to create a long-term vision for Belfast and have identified the key elements which should be considered under the Council Corporate Themes of 'Economy', 'Environment', 'People and Communities' and 'Improve our Services'. Under the Corporate Theme of 'Leadership' Members agreed to review the Council's governance and decision making structures in order to ensure that the Council was fit for purpose and could deliver on its Corporate Plan. Governance Arrangements
2.2	A vital element in the overall success of the Council's new vision for the City is our governance arrangements, that is the way in which we take decisions , are fit for purpose. The Council, through the Corporate Planning process, has emphasised that, in order to maximise the effect we can have, it is crucial that we have a positive and coherent relationship with the Northern Ireland Executive and other key partners in the City to ensure that the Council is aligned to the Programme for Government and makes maximum use of potential external sources of funding. Members have stressed the importance of the Council developing effective external relations and international relations strategies so that the Council's influence on all issues affecting quality of life can be managed effectively. Governance arrangements therefore must also have an externally focused dimension to enable effective partnership working with statutory agencies to deliver on the priorities for the City. Another important element of the governance arrangements, as agreed by Committee at its last meeting, will be to ensure that Party Leaders have the support they need to work effectively across parties in order to ensure that all strategic issues are taken forward effectively.

2.3	<p>Council Constitution</p> <p>Members are due to consider certain elements of the Council’s Governance arrangements over the next number of months. The culmination of these deliberations will be the establishment of a Council Constitution which will set out how we take decisions, deal with the scheme of delegation, the equality scheme, the financial regulations, codes of behaviour and the Standing Orders. The Constitution will be a key governance document which covers ‘who we are’, ‘what we do’, ‘how we do it’ and ‘Our values. It will be a ‘living’ document and once updated it will be reviewed, along with its supporting documents and policies, on a regular basis to ensure they remain up to date. The Party Leaders, Party Groups and Committee will be consulted over the next few months before the new Constitution is finally submitted for the Committee’s consideration.</p>
2.4	<p>Council Representation</p> <p>The matter of Council representation on outside bodies and the issue of declarations of interest will be dealt with by way of two separate but complementary reports. The first will seek to establish a ‘Register of Members’ Interests’ which will be compiled following consultation with each Member and which will be maintained and updated on a regular basis and will give advice on the declaration of private pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests at Council and Committee meetings. The second report will deal with the roles and responsibilities of Members who sit on outside bodies and will give advice on how declarations of interest which might arise through that membership should be handled. Both reports will focus on ensuring that Members are protected from any claims that relevant interests were not declared.</p>
2.5	<p>Decision Making Structures</p> <p>With regard to the overall decision making structures in the Council, Members will be aware that the current Committee structure broadly reflects the Departmental structure with each Committee seeking to deliver on the priorities set out in the individual Departmental Plans. The Council has agreed through the recent Corporate Plan Workshops that it wishes to become more outward facing whilst maintaining a focus on delivering locally. Although the intention of the current Committee structure is to deliver on the key priorities in the Corporate Plan, it would be useful if the Committee could give consideration to whether this model of governance is the most appropriate for the new Council vision. One example could be to consider aligning the Committees with the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.</p>
2.6	<p>It must be stressed that this model is not being proposed to the Committee as the way forward. It is only for the purpose of opening up a discussion on how we wish to align our decision making structures with the new and more outward facing Council vision. Members’ views at this early stage of discussion would be most helpful and there will be a number of subsequent discussions at Committee and through Workshops and Briefings before any changes would be proposed to the Committee</p>
2.7	<p>Party Leaders will meet with an external facilitator in the coming weeks to identify how best they can be supported, both individually and as a group, in helping to take forward strategic issues effectively. The intention is to produce a protocol which will ensure that the necessary mechanisms are in place to fully support the work of the Party Leaders.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	N/A

4	Equality Implications
4.1	N/A

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that the Committee notes the foregoing report and provides direction in respect of any further work to be undertaken when reviewing the Council's governance and decision making structures.

6	Decision Tracking
Officers responsible: Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer November 2011	

7	Key to Abbreviations
N/A	

8	Documents attached
Appendix 1 – Committee Work plan : October to December	