



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Governance Update – Development of Council Constitution
Date:	4 November 2011
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1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	Over the last few years the Council has been putting in place the frameworks and structures needed to make it a <i>'fit for purpose'</i> local authority which can deliver the effective, value for money services that our citizens deserve. An important element of this has been the review of those key governance documents which underpin how the Council operates and makes its decisions.
1.2	As agreed previously by Members, work has been ongoing over recent months to develop a draft Council Constitution which would bring together into one document the key governance instruments which explain and govern how the Council operates; and to do so in a presentable and accessible way.
1.3	Members will note that the DoE issued a consultation document, on 30 November 2010, setting out local government reform policy proposals including the requirement for each council within Northern Ireland to prepare and publish a constitution. Whilst this legislative requirement does not currently exist, it is considered that the work underway will enable the Council to be more transparent and democratic, and will encourage and foster more efficient working practices.
1.4	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current status of the Constitution and to set out a clear timetable scheduling when key strands of work will be submitted for the consideration of Committee.
2.0	Key Issues
2.1	<i>Council Constitution</i> - This is 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 in place it, along with its supporting documents will be reviewed, on a regular basis to ensure they remain up-to-date.
2.2	There is a number of supporting governance documents which will form an integral part of the Council's Constitution, and which are currently under review to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose. These include:
1	Corporate Plan The Council's key strategic planning document setting out the vision and strategic objectives of the Council. As Members are aware work is progressing on the development of the new Corporate Plan 2012-2015.

	<p>2 Standing Orders</p> <p>3 Financial Regulations</p> <p>4 Scheme of Delegation</p> <p>5 Conflicts of Interest Policy</p> <p>6 Equality Scheme</p> <p>7 Code of Governance</p> <p>8 External Relations Strategy</p>	<p>The rules which regulate the transaction of the business of the Council and its Committees and should be read in conjunction with the Council's Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>Provides the framework and processes for managing the council's financial affairs. Currently being updated to take account of the requirements emerging from recent legislative changes including the '<i>Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (NI) 2011</i>' - need for capital financing and treasury management strategies and a medium term financial plan.</p> <p>Sets out the types of decisions, with a key focus on operational /routine matters, which designated officers can take on behalf of the Council. The scheme is being reviewed to update it to take account of organisational change that has taken place over the last number of years. There are no proposals to extend delegated powers merely to rationalise them.</p> <p>Seeks to establish a register of Members interests and to provide clarity in respect to declarations of interests and provide advice on the declaration of private pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests at Council and Committee meetings. A separate, but related complementary paper will address the matter of Council representation on outside bodies and the role of Members on such bodies. Work is progressing on this.</p> <p>The Equality Commission published a revised Equality Guide for Public Authorities in April 2010. As part of this, the Council is required to submit a revised Equality Scheme and Action Plan.</p> <p>Under the '<i>Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006</i>' the Council is required to conduct a review each year of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and prepare an annual governance statement.</p> <p>Setting out how the Council engages and works with key strategic partners to the betterment of the city. Work is progressing on this</p>
2.3	Work is also ongoing on a number of other related strands of work including Members and officers codes of conduct and Member-officer relationship protocols.	
2.4	Members will appreciate the complexity of each of these key governance instruments and the significant amount of work required to review and update these important documents. A proposed timetable for this is set out below for Members consideration.	

PROPOSED COMMITTEE TIMETABLE

Supporting doc	Comments	Committee Timetable					Who
		Nov '11	Dec '11	Jan '12	Feb '12	March'12	
Constitution	Overarching framework	Initial report – 4 th		Update report		Final draft	Chief Executive's Dept - Legal Services Section
Corporate Plan	Member engagement ongoing to inform the development of new Corporate Plan			Update report		Final draft	Chief Executive's Dept
Standing Orders	Work underway to update in-line with recent governance changes			Initial report		Final update	Democratic Services / Legal Services
Financial Regulations	Work underway to update in-line with new legislative requirements					Final update	Finance and Resources
Scheme of Delegation	Work underway to update in-line with recent governance changes					Final draft	Legal Services Section
Conflicts of Interest Policy	Declaration of Interests Policy	Final report - 18 th					Democratic Services / Legal Services / Policy and Planning
	Council representation on outside Bodies				Initial report		
Equality Scheme	Draft Equality Scheme and Interim Action Plan	Out for consultation until 16 th December					Good Relations Unit
Code of Governance	Revised Code of Governance and Corporate Risk Register endorsed by Audit Panel in June 2011.						Audit, Governance and Risk Services
External Relations Strategy	Under development in-line with emerging new Corporate Plan				Update report		Policy & Planning / Corporate Comms. / Development Dept

3.0	<u>Going forwards</u>
3.1	In order to inform the development of this work, there will be continued engagement with Members through established mechanisms including the Party Leaders Forum, the Budget and Transformation Panel and, as required, Party Group briefing sessions.
4.0	<u>Resource Implications</u>
4.1	The updating of the relevant supporting governance documents will require resourcing from Departments. Lead officers from the relevant departments have been identified to update these. A central resource from the Chief Executive's Department is co-ordinating this work and the overall collation and presentation of the Constitution
5.0	<u>Recommendations</u>
5.1	Members are asked to note the content of this report and the proposed timetable when reports will be submitted to Committee for consideration.