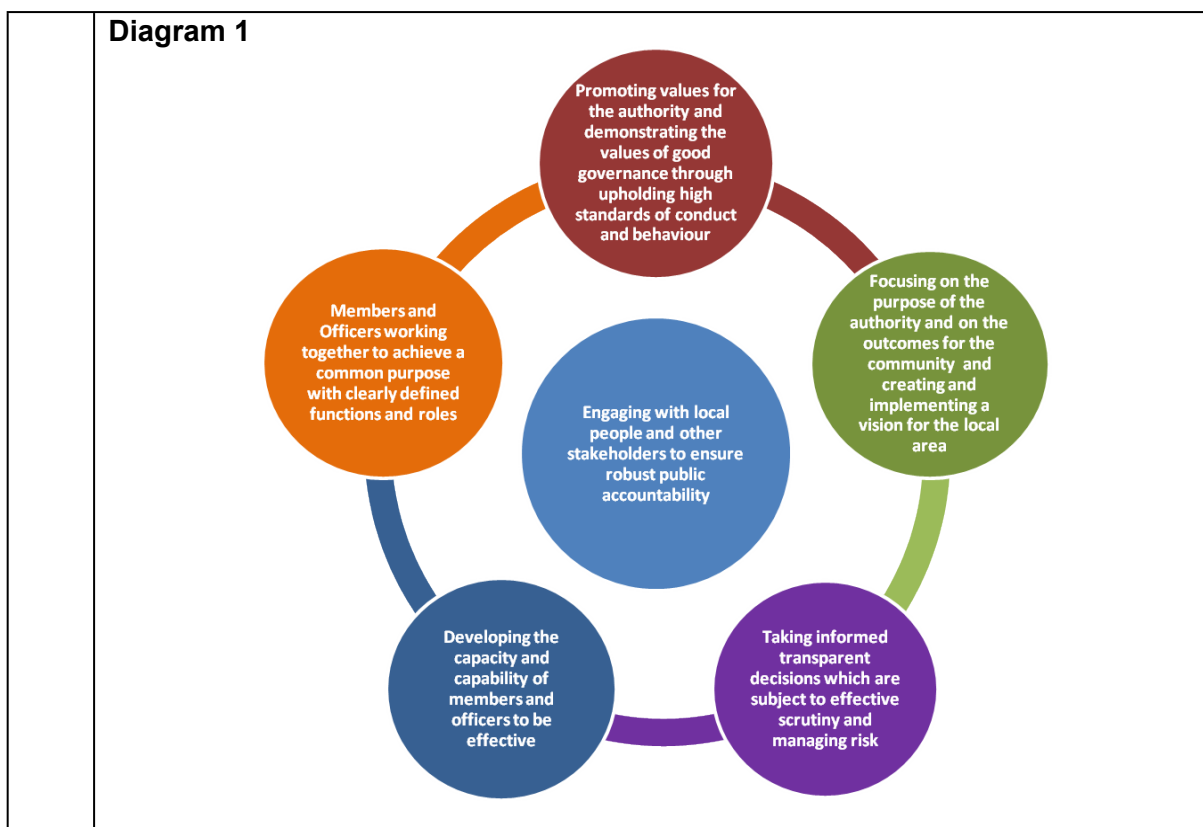




Belfast City Council

Report to	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Update on Future Governance Arrangements for the Council
Date:	19th April, 2013
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources
Contact Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (Ext 6314)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Committee, at its meeting on 14th December, 2012, considered a report on the ongoing review of governance and political management arrangements for the Council. At this meeting Members had been provided with a high-level overview of the range of options which are likely to emerge as part of the local government reform legislative programme (i.e. Reorganisation Bill) regarding future governance and political management arrangements. It was highlighted that the Reorganisation Bill is expected to present three options for the consideration of councils including (i) Traditional Committee System, (ii) Cabinet System, (iii) Streamlined Committee System. A copy of the relevant report is attached as Appendix 1 for Members information.
1.2	In considering the potential future political management arrangements, it is important to restate the good governance principles within which the Council currently operates – see diagram 1.
1.3	At the meeting on 14 December 2012, it was agreed that Party briefings would be held, facilitated by Jonathan Huish, to enable Members to explore what options may exist regarding future governance and political management arrangements for the Council.
1.4	The purpose of the report is to provide an update on Members' discussions to date and the key issues emerging; set out the current legislative timetable linked to local government reform; and to outline the proposed next steps.



2	Key Issues
2.1	<u>Legislative Timetable</u>
	<p>The Environment Minister confirmed at a recent Regional Transition Committee meeting that he intended to introduce the Local Government Reorganisation Bill to the Assembly in April. Members should note that the Bill is expected to include high level enabling legislation on future governance options but that a significant amount of the detail which will be required for the Council to take informed decisions will be issued thereafter as part of a detailed programme of subordinate legislation.</p>
2.2	<p>Regardless of the system of governance selected for the new Council in 2015, the Reorganisation Bill is likely to introduce a series of new checks and balances including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Proportionality</i> – to be applied in the appointment of committees and key positions within council and to external bodies. • <i>Weighted Majority Voting</i> – It is expected that an 80% weighted majority voting will be introduced for decisions which are taken on a number of key areas including e.g. selection of governance structures and major capital projects. • <i>Call-in</i> - it is likely that a system of call-in will be introduced whereby a 15% of the total number of members (in the new council this would be 9 members) will be the trigger point to request a call-in.
2.3	<p>It will be necessary to await the publication of the Reorganisation Bill and subordinate legislation before we can be certain as to how the checks and balances might impact upon effective decision-making but it would be prudent for the Committee to bear in mind that the system will certainly impact upon how we operate in the future.</p>

2.4 Establishment of Statutory Transition Committees

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 includes enabling powers for the Statutory Transition Committee regulations to be made. It is now expected that draft regulations will be laid in the Assembly in April. The Department has pointed out that, subject to the passage of these draft regulations through the Assembly process, this would allow for the Transition Committees to be placed on a statutory footing in June.

2.5 Members' Severance

A consultation document on the Severance Arrangements for Councillors has been released by the Department and a separate report is on the Committee's agenda to consider a Council response.

2.6 Members' Remuneration

The Department has held interviews for the appointment of members to the Remuneration Panel. It is expected that the Panel, which will advise the Minister on the system and level of allowances appropriate for the new councils in 2015 and, potentially the Shadow Councils in 2014, will report by November, 2013. No information is available at this stage as to the identity of the Panel members.

2.7 **Party Briefings on Future Governance Structures**

As agreed by Committee, Jonathan Huish has completed a series of Party briefings to explore with Members their early views on potential future governance and political management arrangements within the Council. During discussions, Members raised a number of issues for further consideration:

- Need to evolve structures so they are fit for future purpose
- Need for an inclusive process – ensuring all members are clearly involved
- Recognise the criticality of getting the degree of delegation right.
- Governance needs to be more joined up across structures
- Need to develop scrutiny function – internal and external
- Need to further develop approach to area working
- Need to have a more strategic city leadership role – engagement with external bodies and partnership working
- Recognise the potential benefits of moving towards a more themed approach and greater integration of service delivery
- Recognition of potential need for a strategic committee role to co-ordinate
- Need to consider impact of local government reform and transfer of new functions including community planning, planning, regeneration etc
- Need to streamline structures and reduce meetings so as to free up Members time and capacity to engage in strategic leadership issues
- Need to review future member roles and responsibilities (and review allowances accordingly)
- Need to build development activities into Belfast Members Academy to ensure members have capacity and knowledge to meet new challenges

2.8	<p>It was clear from the briefings that the Parties would prefer to await the release of the Reorganisation Bill before committing the Council to a particular governance system. Members had requested that on release of the Reorganisation Bill, they would seek further engagement and discussions on the emerging operational models and the potential implications for the Council.</p>
2.9	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>In moving forward it is suggested that the following practical steps be taken to prepare for and to maximise the benefits from the significant change programme that the Council faces over the next couple of years linked to the local government reform process.</p> <p>(i) <u>Members' Capacity and Time Commitments</u></p> <p>One of the most important resources which will be required in addressing the programme of change which the reorganisation of Council governance will present is that of Members time. Members are central to the process of agreeing and embedding change at an organisational level and it will be vital to ensure that there is sufficient time created to allow Members to prioritise this work.</p> <p>With the introduction of regular monthly Party Briefings and the development of the Area Working groups over the last year there has been a marked increase in the number of meetings which Members are being required to attend. Attached at Appendix 2 is an analysis of the number of meetings which have been held for the last three financial years. Members might be surprised to learn that there has been a 50% increase in the number of meetings in the 2012/13 year when compared to the 2011/12 year (258 in 2011/12 and 387 in 2012/13).</p> <p>The Committee may wish to consider that a report be prepared on how Members time can be freed up within the monthly schedule to allow for the programme of work involved in the preparation for the new Council in 2015 and the potential Shadow Council in 2014 to be accommodated.</p> <p>(ii) <u>Drawing upon Good Practice</u></p> <p>Members have already highlighted the importance of drawing upon good practice and experiences from elsewhere to inform the approach to local government reform, the transfer and integration of new place-shaping functions and any governance or political management changes introduced.</p> <p>At its meeting on 5th April, the Council's Voluntary Transition Committee considered detailed reports on the return of Planning & Regeneration powers to the Council as well as the introduction of the Community Planning model. It was acknowledged at that meeting that it would be essential to seek to learn from high performing authorities and it was suggested that it would be beneficial for learning opportunities with Councils from Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to be sought. If the Committee is in agreement, a report will be brought back to Committee in May 2013 setting out detailed proposals regarding a series of good practice visits either to or from such Councils over the next number of months.</p>

	<p>(iii) <u>Reorganisation Bill</u></p> <p>On release of the Reorganisation Bill in April/May 2013, officers will undertake a detailed analysis of what is being proposed; examine the implications for the Council and to identify key issues requiring political consideration. It would be the intention that further Committee and Party briefing sessions would be scheduled in May/June 2013 to explore the detail with Members.</p> <p>(iv) <u>Area Working Groups</u></p> <p>Members have requested that a review be undertaken of the Area Working Groups and the effectiveness of approach to local area working. A separate report on this is included on the Committees agenda.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	There will be cost implications arising from either visits to or from other Local Authorities but any such costs can be met from within existing revenue budgets.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report and to:</p> <p>(i) consider and agree that a further report be brought back setting out options as to how member time could be freed up to allow for the additional commitments required to implement local government reform; and</p> <p>(ii) consider and agree that a report be submitted in May 2013 regarding a series of visits to or from other high performing local authorities who would have experience of undergoing significant governance reform and who deliver Community Planning and planning & regeneration functions.</p>

6	Key to Abbreviations
	STC – Statutory Transition Committee

7	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Governance Committee report – 14 December 2012</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Details of number of meetings in the last 3 financial years</p>