

**Minutes of Budget and Transformation Panel Meeting
15 November 2013**

1. Attendance

Members:

Alderman Gavin Robinson (Chair)
Councillor Tim Attwood
Councillor Maire Hendron
Councillor Deidre Hargey
Councillor Lee Reynolds

Apologies:

Councillor John Kyle

Officers:

Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources
Gerry Miller, Director of Property and Projects
Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure (for item 7)
Eamon Deeney, Head of Corporate Communications
Mark McBride, Head of Finance and Performance
Caroline Wilson, Neighbourhood and Development Manager (for item 7)

2. Rates 2014/15

The Director of Finance and Resources distributed the draft SP&R report which summarised the current position regarding the 2014/15 revenue estimates and the 1%, 0% and -2% District Rate scenarios as agreed at the October meeting of the Panel.

It was agreed that the final report presented to Committee on the 22 November, should include specific examples of projects and initiatives that could form the future efficiency programme and that the report should seek approval to present a further report to the December Committee based on the preferred option of a 0% increase in the District Rate.

Members stressed the importance of recognising that with inflation at 2.2%, setting a zero district rate represented a reduction of 2.2% in real terms and this, together with the fact that the Council would be maintaining its capital investment commitments, should underpin the communication messages around the rate setting. It was also important to note that the current £2m efficiency target sit alongside a commitment of a further £2m of savings from leisure transformation and £2m from the new rate base to support the financing of the leisure capital investment.

3. Half Year Finance

Members noted the report on the half year finance position, which reported a forecast year end under spend position of £644k which represented less than 0.5% of the Council's total budget.

It was also noted that the Director of Finance and Resources would be recommending that no reallocation be made at this stage, given that the forecasts for both the Council's budget and the rates position are close to break even.

4. Half Year Capital Programme

The Director of Property and Projects provided a verbal update on the capital programme and advised that a full report on the programme as well as the local Investment Fund and Belfast Investment Fund would be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 22 November.

5. Local Government Reform

The Chief Executive provided an overview of the update report on the Local Government Reform, which included the proposed allocation of the £2m LGR budget to support the transition phase of reform. He reminded Members that the funding had been established by Committee as a specified reserve and therefore the resources would be provided at no additional cost to the ratepayers.

The Panel agreed that the report should be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 22 November.

6. Investment Programme

The Chief Executive distributed a comprehensive report which provided the half year update on the Investment Programme. This included "Year 2" highlights of the physical programme, including the Capital Programme, Local Investment Fund and Belfast Investment Fund, as well as the impact of actions within the Economy, People Communities and Neighbourhoods, and Value for Money themes of the programme.

The report included detailed appendices on the physical and revenue projects, external monies levied through the investment programme, an evaluation of communications activity undertaken between June and October 2013 and proposals for further communications activity in November 2013 to January 2014 aligned to funding announcements for several "flagship" physical projects and the opening of the new Welcome Centre.

7. Leisure Transformation Programme

The Director of Parks and Leisure and the Neighbourhood and Development Manager, provided an update on the Leisure Transformation Programme including the communication and engagement with Trade Unions and the visit by Trade Union officials to Greenwich Leisure.

The Director distributed a draft policy document which proposed key principles characteristics which the Council would expect of a "mutual" should this form of delivery be chosen. It was suggested that the protection for staff in such sensitive areas as pensions should be included and also the opportunity to involve Members and staff at Board level should be more specific. It was also highlighted that protection for staff in such sensitive areas as pensions was a key consideration in the forthcoming decisions on the preferred business model. Members also asked that management ensure that there were appropriate communication channels with all staff and not just Trade Unions, as not all staff were union members.

It was agreed that the proposal to form-hold a Leisure Transformation Elected Members Working Group Workshop should be held in advance of the next considered at the Strategic Policy and Resources meeting on the 13 December, with Members on the Parks and Leisure Committee invited to the meeting for that item workshop.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Friday 6 December 2013.