



Belfast City Council

Report to: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: **Transfer of Planning Function – Response from the Minister**

Date: 20th February, 2015

Reporting Officer: Mrs. Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 16th January, it had agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for the Environment, Mr. Mark Durkan, MLA, outlining the Council's concern at the anticipated costs which would be incurred in overseeing the transfer of the planning function from the DOE to the Council. That additional cost had been estimated to be in the region of £735,000, which would be at variance with the view that the Local Government Reform would be 'rates neutral' to the ratepayer.
1.2	The letter to the Minister, which was copied to the Finance Minister for information, outlined also the Council's concerns in respect of the possible costs which would be incurred in overseeing the DOE's planning portal post-2019. Accordingly, the Council had requested that clarity be provided on the longer-term options for the upkeep and maintenance of that portal, particularly in respect of its future governance and funding arrangements.
1.3	Finally, the Council's sought assurances on the extent of the Industrial De-rating grant which would be made to the Council as a result of Local Government Reform.
1.4	The letter has been appended to this report as Appendix 1.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The Minister's response indicates that the extent of the budget to be allocated to the Council had been clarified within the DOE's document entitled, 'Transfer of Planning Functions to Local Government – Position Paper on Transfer of Resources', which had been issued in January.
2.2	It is suggested by the Minister that the budget to be provided to the Council, coupled with the additional income generated through the planning function, would enable the Council to deliver and manage the planning function in an efficient manner following LGR.

2.2	Regarding the planning portal, the Minister confirms that the responsibility for its replacement and upkeep will transfer to local Councils in 2019. However, it is intended that a 'Planning Portal Board' will be established early in the 2015/2016 financial year to examine the requirements for the portal post-2019. That Board will consist of representatives of the 11 new Councils, together with officers from the DOE. Despite this step, the Minister suggests that the development, governance and the costs associated with the new portal will fall within the remit of local government. Given that the 'Planning Portal Board' has yet to be established, the Minister feels that a meeting between himself and a Council deputation would not be beneficial at this stage, as had been requested.
2.3	Regarding the Industrial De-rating grant to be paid to the Council, the Minister has confirmed that the Council will be in receipt of the full grant for 2015/2016.
2.4	The Minister's letter is appended as Appendix 2.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	To be determined.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	None

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is requested to consider the Minister's response.

6	Decision Tracking
Democratic Services Section will implement any decision taken.	