

**From the office of the
Minister of the Environment**



Department of the
Environment
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Cllr. Christopher Stalford,
Chair of Shadow Strategic Policy
& Resources Committee,
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Your reference:

Our reference: COR/123/2015

/4 February 2015

Dear Cllr. Stalford.

Thank you for your letter dated 30 January 2015 regarding the transfer of planning functions to local government and the 2015-16 de-rating grant.

Planning Reform Budget Allocation

The final budget allocation has been agreed by the Executive and approved by the Assembly. The Department has always been committed to ensuring that the transferring planning function is fit for purpose and adequately resourced to ensure the success of the planning process following reform. A number of the issues you have raised have been dealt with directly in the 'Transfer of Planning Functions to Local Government Position Paper on Transfer of Resources' which was issued in January 2015. Given the additional funding being provided for the planning function and the anticipated level of income from Planning Receipts, the Department remains confident that Belfast City Council will have adequate resources to manage the planning function following reform.

Planning Portal

The Department advised the Local Government Sector at the Regional Transition Operation Board on 20 January 2015 that the Department of the Environment (DOE) will not be responsible for the replacement Planning System post March 2019.

The department recognises there is an urgent need for the Planning Authorities to begin considering the available options for a potential replacement system early in the new financial year. Following reform a Planning Portal Board will be established which will include representation from all 11 councils and the DOE. It will be the responsibility of this group to set out the strategy for the processing of planning applications post 2019.

As the department will be responsible for less than one per cent of future planning applications I feel that it would be prudent for the Local Government Sector itself, rather than the DOE, to take the lead on discussions regarding any future planning system, associated governance arrangements and potential costs.

As the Planning Portal Board has not yet been established and the sector as a whole has not collectively begun considering the challenges it will face in relation to the portal, I do not feel that a meeting would be beneficial at this time.

Industrial De-Rating Grant

I am pleased to inform you that on 4 February 2015 my Department advised Belfast City Council that it would be paying the full de-rating grant for 2015-16.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Durkan', written in a cursive style.

MARK H DURKAN MLA
Minister of the Environment