



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of Public Administration Update
Date:	Friday, 18 <sup>th</sup> April, 2008
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1.0	<b><u>RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION</u></b>
1.1	On 31 <sup>st</sup> March, 2008 the Environment Minister made a statement (a copy of which is attached at <b>Appendix 1</b> ) to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the RPA and the future shape of Local Government within Northern Ireland.
2.0	<b><u>KEY ISSUES</u></b>
2.1	<b><u>New Councils</u></b> <p>In the Ministers' speech she stated that the current 26 Councils will be rationalised to create 11 new Council areas and will be based on the 11b model put forward as part of the original RPA proposals (copy of which is attached at <b>Appendix 2</b>). This would result in a reconfiguration and grouping of Councils on the following basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Belfast CC</li><li>▪ North Down BC and Ards BC</li><li>▪ Down DC and Newry &amp; Mourne DC</li><li>▪ Craigavon BC, Armagh C&amp;DC and Banbridge DC</li><li>▪ Lisburn CC and Castlereagh BC</li><li>▪ Antrim BC and Newtownabbey BC</li><li>▪ Ballymena BC, Larne BC and Carrickfergus BC</li><li>▪ Moyle DC, Ballymoney BC, Coleraine BC, Limavady BC</li><li>▪ Magherafelt DC, Cookstown DC, Dungannon &amp; South Tyrone BC</li><li>▪ Omagh DC and Fermanagh DC</li><li>▪ Derry CC and Strabane DC</li></ul>
2.2	<b><u>Functions and Budget</u></b> <p>In terms of new functions transferring to Local Government, the Minister has stated that the following range of functions will transfer: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>planning</b> - local development plan functions; development control; and enforcement</li><li>▪ <b>local roads public realm</b> - streetscaping; town and city centre environmental improvements; grass cutting and weed spraying; gully emptying; street lighting; off-street parking; pedestrian permits; maintenance of amenity areas; alley-gating; permitting local events to be held on roads; and salting of footways; enhanced accountability framework within which the Roads Service relationship with local government will operate</li><li>▪ <b>urban regeneration and community development</b> - physical development; area-based regeneration; some community development programmes; and support for the voluntary and community sectors</li><li>▪ <b>housing</b> - registration of houses in multiple occupation; housing unfitness responsibilities including repair and demolition notices; energy conservation at a local level; and</li></ul>

travellers' transit sites

- **economic development** - Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows; Youth Entrepreneurship; Social Entrepreneurship Programme; Investing in Women; and Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprise initiatives
- **tourism** - small scale tourism accommodation development; local tourism marketing and product development; visitor servicing; providing business support; and providing advice to developers on tourism policies
- **others** - local arts, sports and leisure; EU Rural Development Programme; Spot Listing of buildings; local listing of buildings of architectural/historic interest; Armagh County Museum; local water recreational facilities; local sports; functions of the NI Museum Council; local arts; local festivals; and Donaghadee Harbour

The scale of those functions that will transfer to Local Government currently accounts for an annual expenditure of some £116 million and involves some 1,070 staff. It constitutes a 25% increase in the budget of Local Government and an increase of almost 12% of staff.

## 2.3 Community Planning

2.3.1 The Minister has stated that a new statute-based community planning process would be introduced and lead by Councils and will be supported with a statutory power of well being. This power of well being will allow Councils to take any action, not already the responsibility of another agency, linked with the community plan that will improve the well being of the local community.

2.3.2 The statement notes that community planning and the power of well being will help with the Minister's aim 'to put community leadership at the heart of every Council, and in the hands of every Councillor, bringing together public agencies and key stakeholders to act in partnership to secure excellent and efficient services and address local problems'.

2.3.3 It is the Minister's intention, in taking forward the RPA reform package, to place a clear statutory requirement upon other public bodies (including policing, health and education bodies) to participate and support the community planning process and a clear duty placed on Councils to engage with local communities in producing a community plan.

## 2.4 Reconfigured Local Government Boundaries

2.4.1 A Local Government (Boundaries) Bill will be introduced, by way of accelerated passage, to enable the appointment of an independent Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to draw up the proposed boundaries for the new Local Government Districts.

## 2.5 Number of Councillors

2.5.1 Under the new arrangements, Belfast will have an upper limit of around 60 Councillors. The remaining Councils will have an upper limit of around 40 Councillors. The precise numbers of Councillors for each new local government district will be informed by the report from the independent Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

## 2.6 Severance Arrangements

2.6.1 A severance scheme will also be introduced, possibly as a rolling programme from 2008, in recognition of the contribution of long serving Councillors who opt not to stand for re-election and to facilitate the modernisation and renewal of local government.

2.6.2 Members will accept that this could potentially have significant implications on the political capacity within the Local Government sector with long-term, experienced Councillors deciding to stand down.

## 2.7 Public Representation

2.6.1 Arrangements will also be developed whereby local government will have a formal input to the decisions in relation to a number of responsibilities that are remaining with central government. Specifically Local Government will have formal liaison arrangements with Roads Service.

## 2.8 Ongoing Progress

2.8.1 The Minister has indicated that this is the first step in the reform process and that the

Executive will review the family of functions to be delivered by local government 12 months after the new Councils become operational and periodically thereafter.

## 2.9 **Functional and Transitional Implementation Arrangements**

2.9.1 The Minister is seeking significant support from Ministerial colleagues to enable the NI Executive to meet the tight delivery deadlines for the RPA reform process. Specifically, she will be seeking a funding package for a Local Government Modernisation Challenge Fund to support implementation.

2.9.2 It is intended that the RPA and Local Government modernisation implementation process will take place under the guidance of the Strategic Leadership Board, a renewed set of three Policy Development Panels and 11 new Transition Committees which will be set up in each of the new Council areas. All the work will be underpinned with a communications strategy and programme management arrangements.

## 2.10 **Timescale for Implementation**

2.10.1 The Minister's aim is to implement the agreed structural reform package by 2011, in line with the elections to the new Assembly, which is clearly a challenging timescale to meet. There are two main options for this to occur. Firstly, the current Council term might be extended to 2011. This option requires the consent of the Secretary of State and legally it might be difficult to extend the current term for any longer than a year. Secondly, elections might take place in 2010 for less than a four year term which would allow elections to take place for the new Councils in 2011 with a transitional period before the new Councils actually get up and running. .

## 3.0 **NEXT STEPS FOR BELFAST CITY COUNCIL**

3.1 Members will accept that we are rapidly approaching a critical stage in the RPA process and in defining the future shape and role of Local Government within Northern Ireland. It is critical that the Council is effectively engaged within the ongoing discussions around implementation and is represented on the delivery structures put in place.

3.2 Work will have to be undertaken to build the necessary mechanisms to enable the transfer of functions. Smaller functions will be easier to transfer than bigger functions such as planning and regeneration. Much detailed work will be required to build the capacity of Councils to take on the new functions.

3.3 Members will further accept that the circumstance for Belfast is unique in that it will not change significantly in terms of scale and geographical location. There is a great opportunity for Belfast to take a leading role on behalf of the Local Government Sector and start the process of learning through the initiation of pilot (e.g., pathfinder) initiatives in the lead up to and in preparation for 2011.

3.4 The Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA, has already stated her eagerness to take forward pilot projects around the transfer of neighbourhood renewal and urban regeneration functions although officers have indicated that this might be difficult to achieve. Consideration should be given to the possible extension of such pilots to take account of the wider community planning agenda and the quality of life issues that affect our city and its people.

3.5 It will be important that the Council continue to engage both directly with Ministers and within the delivery structures established to demonstrate its willingness to take forward such pilots and help shape the transitional arrangements on behalf of the Local Government sector.

3.6 The Council, at both political and senior officer level, need now to start thinking strategically of how the Council could take full advantage of and engage within the RPA and Local Government Modernisation processes and how the transferring functions will be incorporated within, managed and delivered effectively by the Council. This must be considered within the context of the emerging Corporate Plan and the Council's ambitions of becoming an organisation "fit to lead and serve".

- 3.7 Members will note that a detailed scoping paper will be brought to the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting in May, examining the possible implications and key issues emerging from the outworking of RPA recommendations and setting out, for Members consideration, a detailed programme of work necessary to prepare and enable the Council to effectively manage the significant change process ahead.
- 3.8 The council also needs to consider commissioning an implementation report, drawing on best practice from recent local governance reviews in Scotland, Wales and ROI which would then form the basis for detailed political engagement with ministers.

#### **4.0 Resource Implications**

##### Financial and Human Resources

There are no Financial or Human Resource implications contained within this report.

#### **5.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and, in particular, that a further detailed report and accompanying RPA scoping paper will be brought to the Committee in May, 2008.

Members are further requested to seek meetings with relevant ministers before the end of June by a cross party delegation led by the chair of SP&R Committee.

#### **6.0 Documents Attached**

**Appendix 1** Ministerial Announcement on the RPA - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008

**Appendix 2** Local Government Reconfiguration 11B Model