



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	NI Assembly liaison/update
Date:	Friday 18 th April 2008
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Relevant Background Information

This report is being brought on a monthly basis to Strategic P&R as agreed at August 2007 meeting. It provides contact and update information on the work of the Assembly to assist Members liaise with, and influence the work of, the Assembly and ensure that the interests of the city of Belfast are most effectively represented.

Key Issues

1. Belfast City Council guide to the Assembly

An updated version of this guide is available on the Members' portal.

2. Official liaison with the Assembly

In order to ensure that the Council is aligned in its approach and liaison with the Assembly, it was agreed that Assembly/Ministerial updates are added as a standing item to the agenda of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the appropriate Committees of the Council.

3. Update on Assembly business

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) announcements

On 31st March 2008, Environment Minister Arlene Foster made a statement to the Assembly outlining the Executive's vision for local government. The full Minister's Statement can be viewed on the DOE website (www.doeni.gov.uk). In her speech she stated that new councils will have a new Power of Well Being, a Community Planning Duty and new governance arrangements which will all be set out in statute.

The current 26 council areas will be rationalised to create 11 new council areas.

The Minister outlined that the functions to transfer to local government include:

- Local development plan functions, development control and enforcement;
- Local public realm aspects of road functions including streetscaping; town and city centre environmental improvements; street lighting; off-street parking; permitting local events to be held on roads etc;
- Urban regeneration and community development delivery functions including those associated with physical development, area based regeneration (such as Neighbourhood Renewal) along with some community development programmes and support for the voluntary and community sectors;
- A range of housing functions;
- A number of functions associated with driving forward local economic

development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

Budget Bill - 31st March

The Budget Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 became law on 12 March 2008.

Varney Review

On 31st March the assembly expressed its deep concern at the conclusions of Sir David Varney's Review of Tax policy in Northern Ireland; maintains that it is flawed in not sufficiently recognising the particular economic and geographical circumstances of this region; and calls on the Executive to bring forward a detailed Regional Economic Strategy that will address the economic and financial dependency of Northern Ireland, and facilitate a step-change in the Northern Ireland economy, in terms of closing the productivity gap with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Older People's Commissioner

Following on from the announcement on 18th December OFMDFM will create a Northern Ireland Commissioner for Older People, three consultation events are currently being organised, one in Cookstown and two further events in Belfast and Londonderry to assist in developing proposals for the specific remit of the Office. A report is to be presented to OFMDFM shortly.

Multi-Sports Stadium

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure on 7th March stated that the Outline Business Case on the Multi-Sports Stadium is currently with the Department of Finance and Personnel for scrutiny and, if approved, will then be submitted, as part of the overall Maze/Long Kesh proposal, to the Executive for consideration.

Titanic Signature Project

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is continuing to work with Titanic Quarter Limited and the Belfast Harbour Commissioners to identify potential funding sources for the construction and completion of the Titanic Signature Project by 2012. In light of the elapse of time, the project will be subject to an updated economic appraisal.

Neighbourhood Renewal

The Department for Social Development's spending plans for Neighbourhood Renewal Areas for the period from 2008 - 2011 will be finalised on a rolling financial year basis. Spending commitments for the new Comprehensive Spending Review period will be based on a combination of factors including the prioritisation of competing demands for funding, the rate at which projects in receipt of commitments of funding progress and the potential availability of additional resources that may be secured as part of in-year funding bids. As plans are drawn together there will be an opportunity to make longer term commitments of Neighbourhood Renewal funds to some projects over the three year funding window and scope to bring planned schemes and projects forward as resources permit.

Community Safety Partnerships - Investment

The Government is to invest over £9.5 million to strengthen and support local communities in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

Criminal Justice Minister Paul Goggins unveiled on 6th March the financial package as he addressed representatives from all 26 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) at an event in Newcastle.

The three year funding package will assist in the delivery of front line projects that will identify and deliver local solutions to local problems and contribute to strategic priorities with a particular focus on anti-social behaviour and violent crime.

Policing and Criminal Justice

On the 11th March the Assembly approved the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee relating to the devolution of policing and justice matters, and agreed that, as required by section 18 of the Northern Ireland (St. Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, it should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, before 27 March 2008, as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) is conducting a broad inquiry into the administration of policing and the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. The first phase of this inquiry will focus on two specific areas of current concern:

- The financial and operational consequences for the PSNI of servicing the various 'historic inquiries' into past events in Northern Ireland; and
- The effect on the ability of the Police Service Northern Ireland to bring accused persons to trial of provisions in the Inquiries Act 2005 and in other legislation requiring the police to divulge information which might identify a covert source.

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

On the 1st April the Second Stage of the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill (NIA 12/07) was agreed.

Combating Underage Drinking

On 1st April the Assembly expressed concern at the levels of underage drinking and calls on the Executive's Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to bring urgently before the Assembly proposals to combat underage drinking.

Bin Tax Pilot

Minister of the Environment has no plans to introduce a 'Bin-Tax' pilot scheme in Northern Ireland.

Traffic Congestion

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) proposes a programme of up to 14 Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) focused on Belfast. In addition to those implemented to date, bus lanes are planned for the Lisburn Road, Malone Road and Saintfield Road corridors in South Belfast. An additional 800 metres of bus lane on the Ormeau Road is planned for implementation by the end of March 2008 and Selective Vehicle Detection, which detects late buses and adjusts the signal timings to assist them, is being provided at all the traffic signals in South Belfast. Several other measures are outlined in the plan.

Light Rail System

The Department for Regional Development commissioned a feasibility study for Rapid Transit for Belfast. The scope of this study included determining the best system in terms of technology (either light rail or bus rapid transit), routes and costs. The study also explored how any system should be funded, including the scope for developer contributions from the private sector. The Minister is reviewing the study findings and will be discussing it with the Regional Development Committee and Executive shortly.

First Minister

The Reverend Ian Paisley MP MLA announced this month that he will now be stepping down as First Minister and DUP Party Leader.

Resource Implications

Financial

No financial implications

Human Resources

No HR implications

Asset and Other Implications

No asset or other implications

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the above report.

Key to Abbreviations

N/A

Documents Attached

N/A