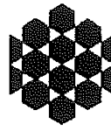


From the office of the
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Mayors and Chief Executives

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Dear Mayors and Chief Executives

15 June 2008

TRANSITION ARRANGEMENTS AND EARLY COOPERATION BETWEEN MERGING COUNCILS

Introduction

As you will know, I have assumed Ministerial responsibility for the Department of the Environment from Arlene Foster. We have now entered the implementation phase of the RPA. This will be a time of major opportunity but also a time of significant challenge for everyone across the sector. On behalf of the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) I would like to invite you as a council to fully support the work of policy development and implementation to build strong and effective local government for the future. I and SLB colleagues trust that this early information will be helpful and in keeping with work that is already beginning to take place within Councils.

Transition Arrangements

I have been advised that at the Strategic Leadership Board on 14 May 2008, the issue of developing robust transition arrangements to achieve an orderly conversion to the new local government structures by 2011 was discussed as a priority issue.

The Board agreed to set up a working group to develop proposals for the transition. The working group will be led by a Council Chief Executive and have NILGA and Departmental representation. The purpose of this group will be to set out the options for transition and the legal requirements. As part of this work, my Department is already seeking legal advice on what work can be carried out through the current powers available under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 and the need for any additional legal powers.

In parallel, the SLB is also working with SOLACE and PWC to identify the operational resource requirements to support implementation. The intention is to bring a preliminary report to the next SLB meeting, which I hope will be held in late June, and we will subsequently write to councils informing them of the emerging findings.

Cooperation between Councils

The SLB would like to encourage Councils, as many are already doing, to begin to work together with their partnering Council(s) on issues which support convergence. Detailed guidance on how to move forward with the implementation process will be issued by the SLB to councils as soon as possible. It is anticipated that the following functions will be areas for co-operation:

- Human Resources
- Financial systems
- Capital projects
- Information Technology
- Good Relations/Equality
- Corporate Planning
- Performance Management
- Legal issues
- Policy
- Estates
- Governance
- Communications
- Transition Arrangements
- Cultural / Value Issues

It is important to note that Councils should avoid activity which may compromise any sector-wide strategic initiatives which may be taken forward as part of the modernisation agenda. This would include initiatives such as eGovernment, Shared Services, IS Strategy and Customer Relationship Management. Paragraph 49 of the Local Government Auditor's report for 2006/2007 provides useful guidance on capital expenditure within local government during the period leading up to the creation of the new Councils.

Policy Development Panels (PDPs)

NILGA hopes to finalise the political nominations to the PDPs shortly and is working with SOLACE and the LGSC to identify lead Chief Executives for each panel. It is

intended that the PDPs will hold their first meetings in June, primarily to agree on their terms of reference, review position papers and agree work programmes. An update from each PDP will be provided to the next SLB.

This is a time of major change within the sector and we all share responsibility for our future. We do not want 'change for change' sake – we want to get it right for the benefit of our citizens. We would appreciate your consideration of the issues highlighted and look forward to working collaboratively with you in the implementation of the RPA.

Yours sincerely

Sammy Wilson

SAMMY WILSON MP MLA
Minister of the Environment

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