

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy
Date:	14 <sup>th</sup> December 2012
Reporting Officer:	Mrs Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health and Environmental Services Department
Contact Officer:	Mr Damian Connolly, Environmental Health Manager, (Food Safety and Port Health) Ext 3361



## 1.0 Background

1.1 In 2001 the Northern Ireland Executive first endorsed a Better Regulation Strategy which aimed to reduce the regulatory burdens on businesses, and in so doing to encourage and assist the competitiveness and growth of Northern Ireland businesses.

1.2 To date the Strategy has focused only on the central NI Government Departments and has not included the work of local authorities.

1.3 Despite not being included, Belfast City Council recognised the potential for the “Better Regulation Strategy” to help improve public protection in a way that was fair and encouraged economic progress. Council Officers have regularly met with DETI and other Government Departments to discuss Better Regulation and the Council has been working to ensure the principles of Better Regulation are applied to all its enforcement and regulatory approaches.

- 1.4 Key decisions taken to date by Belfast City Council supporting Better Regulation include:
- Formally adopting “The Enforcement Concordat” in 2003 and subsequently using its principles of good enforcement as the blue print for all our enforcement policies thereafter.
  - In February 2009 agreeing in principle to the adoption of the “Statement of Intent” between N.I. councils, DETI and Local Better Regulation Office. The agreement established the Councils’ intentions to have regard to the principles of better regulation, LBRO guidance and to comply with the standards of the Regulators Compliance Code.
  - In December 2011 the Council agreed its Regulation and Enforcement Policy formally adopting the principles of Better Regulation and aiming to ensure all its regulatory actions are proportionate; accountable; consistent; transparent and targeted.

## 2.0 Key Issues

2.1 Following a review of NI Executives “Better Regulation Strategy” in 2009/2010 it was proposed that the strategy should be extended to cover the regulatory and enforcement work of local authorities. This reflected the significant regulatory responsibilities of councils particularly in the areas of environmental health, building control and business licensing.

2.2 Subsequently earlier this year Arlene Foster MLA, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, wrote to each Council in Northern Ireland to seek its formal agreement to extend the scope of the Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy to include all of Northern Ireland's local authorities.

2.3 As the Council has consistently worked to ensure the principles of Better Regulation are applied to all its regulatory activities, this is not seen as something new but rather a formalisation of its existing approach. It is therefore not envisaged that including local Authorities within the strategy will impose an additional resource demand on the Council or its services.

2.4 Specifically including the work of Local Authorities within the strategy is seen as an important step in recognising important work Councils do in protecting citizens and supporting businesses. It is hoped it will help build on the existing relationships and further improve collaboration with government departments, other regulators and stakeholders.

2.5 Better Regulation continues to help encourage business growth and competitiveness and support of Belfast City Councils investment program.

### 3.0 Resource Implications

3.1 No additional resource implications anticipated

## 4. Key to Abbreviations

DETI : Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

LBRO: Local Better Regulation Office

### 5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

5.1 No equality or good relations implications identified

### 6.0 Recommendations

**6.1** Committee is asked to:

- to recommend Belfast City Council formally agree that the scope of the Northern Ireland Better regulation Strategy should be extended to include all of Northern Irelands local authorities.
- to recommend the Lord Mayor write to Arlene Foster MLA, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm its decision .

### 7.0 Documents attached

7.1 Appendix 1: Letter from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment