BELFAST STATUTORY TRANSITION COMMITTEE

DRAFT RESPONSE

Key points to be included in response re Development of a Scheme between DSD and Local Government to support capacity building for Regeneration/Community Development activities

General

- The transfer of functions from central government to local government must be effectively managed to seek to ensure local government has the necessary skills and knowledge in place at the right to continue service delivery. Any processes for secondment should be fair, clear, open and transparent and should seek to avoid any potential confusion/uncertainty at a time of significant change - maintaining the commitment and performance of staff is essential.

- Belfast City Council agrees in principle that seconding the relevant staff with the skills, knowledge and aptitude in the functions transferring to local government is extremely important to build the capacity needed by Belfast City Council to deliver regeneration and community development. Clearly, detailed consideration will have to be given to how such a scheme/process would operate and the earliest involvement of stakeholders in its development would be beneficial.

- Skills transfer and knowledge sharing needs to start with immediate effect to ensure service continuity at point of transfer.

In relation to the specific draft principles for the development of a secondment scheme between DSD and Local Government to support capacity building for regeneration and community development Belfast City Council would comment as follows:

1. The scheme will operate in partnership between local government and DSD.

   Partnership working between Local Government and the DSD is essential to ensure councils have the capacity to take on responsibility for regeneration and community development.

2. The scheme will ensure that DSD is able to effectively deliver regeneration and community development in the period up to RLG transfer date.

   Regardless of what scheme is used this will be essential as councils are not currently set up to effectively and fully deliver these activities. Early clarification is required however on how it is envisaged capacity building with councils and knowledge sharing will be undertaken.

3. The scheme will assist local government to develop the capacity it requires to effectively deliver regeneration and community development from the RLG transfer date onwards.
The council strongly advocates that any secondment arrangements and knowledge sharing be initiated at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure capacity development in the lead up to transfer to enable service continuity. Having secondment arrangements in place to facilitate capacity building will help councils to prepare for delivery of regeneration and community development from the RLG transfer date. This will however very much depend on attracting the appropriately skilled resources and the transfer of the essential knowledge and skills. Clear success and measurable outcomes for building capacity will have to be agreed at the outset.

4. **The scheme will ensure that there is a smooth transition between delivery arrangements.**

   A secondment arrangement should help ensure a smooth transition but it will depend on securing the timely and necessary resources i.e. the right people in place at the right time with the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure effective transition.

5. **Sufficient time will be built in to adequately develop the scheme.**

   If the established Interchange Scheme is used as a method of arranging secondment arrangements there will be no need to develop a new scheme.

   Any processes for secondment should be fair, clear, open and transparent.

   Detailed consideration will have to be given to how such a scheme/process would operate and the earliest involvement of stakeholders in its development would be beneficial.

6. **The scheme will be taken forward through a phased approach, with 3 specific phases envisaged:**

   a. A preparatory period prior to April 2015
   b. An embedding period between April 2015 and March 2017
   c. An established/mature phase post 2017

   A phased approach will be useful to ensure readiness for service transfer. Clear measurable success outcomes will have to be established at the outset with a view to a formal evaluation taking place before the proposed established phase post 2017. Clarification is required on the detail and proposed duration of any secondment arrangement.

   Given the interface and relationships of the regeneration powers with other transferring functions and current council responsibilities councils may wish to directly recruit additional resources whilst still availing of DSD expertise.

7. **Participation of staff in the scheme will be voluntary and based on an application and selection process.**

   It would seem appropriate to have a voluntary scheme as there is no compulsory transfer of DSD staff to Local Government. Should however this result in too few staff
wishing to be seconded other mechanisms of formal knowledge sharing will need to be considered and started at the earliest possible opportunity.

8. **The scheme will be open to members of Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group within DSD.**

The scheme should be open to all appropriate employees within DSD who have the necessary knowledge and skills. For example councils will require knowledge transfer on strategic, operational, grants, administration and support issues.