

# Belfast Voluntary Transition Committee

Friday, 11th January, 2013

## MEETING OF BELFAST VOLUNTARY TRANSITION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairman);  
the High Sheriff (Alderman M. Campbell);  
Aldermen Browne and R. Newton; and  
Councillors Attwood, Convery, Corr, Haire,  
Hendron, Hussey, Lavery, Maskey, McCarthy,  
McVeigh, Ó Muilleoir, A. Newton and Reynolds.

In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;  
Mr. C. Quigley, Assistant Chief Executive/Town Solicitor;  
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;  
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;  
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; and  
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

### Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Jones.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd December.

### Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported

### Change of Membership

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Hussey to his first meeting of the Committee, having replaced Councillor McKee, and to Councillor Reynolds to his first meeting in his role of Deputy Chairman. The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee recorded her thanks to Councillor McKee for the work he had undertaken as Deputy Chairman of the Committee during the previous eighteen months.

## **Review of Public Administration**

### **Local Government Reform – Discussions with Lisburn and Castlereagh**

The Chief Executive submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

#### **“1.0 Relevant Background Information**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that as part of the local government reform programme, the new Belfast District Council boundary, scheduled to come into effect by 2015, will encompass parts of the adjacent Lisburn, Castlereagh and a small portion of North Down council areas.

#### **2.0 Key Issues**

- 2.1 As instructed by Committee, joint political discussions are ongoing with representatives from the Lisburn/Castlereagh Voluntary Transition Committee to examine and identify the information requirements and necessary pieces of work which need to be taken forward jointly in preparation for the extension of the Council's boundary. A recent meeting took place on 11 December 2012 and a copy of the draft minutes has been circulated for Members consideration.
- 2.2 In recognition of the resource pressures on dealing with reform and delivering business as usual, it was suggested that the work programme be taken forward in two phases. In summary the key issues discussed by Members during the meeting included the following:

##### **2.2.1 Phase I Work-plan – For Members Consideration**

###### ***a. Assets and Liabilities transfer***

Lisburn/Castlereagh seeking agreement in principle that those assets, and associated liabilities, currently owned by both councils which are located within the new Belfast boundary, would transfer to Belfast City Council. An initial list provided by Lisburn/Castlereagh setting out those assets/buildings/land which is currently owned by both councils and which will be located within new BCC boundary has also been circulated.

***b. Staff Transfer***

Lisburn/Castlereagh seeking agreement in principle that appropriate levels of staff transfer to Belfast. Recommended that initial work be undertaken to review and identify possible staff numbers on the basis of the following three categories:

- staff directly employed & based in a facility transferring to Belfast
- staff who are not employed in a facility transferring, but who work all, or the majority of their time (in the areas transferring)
- staff who provide support to categories 1 & 2 (proportionate)

It was noted at the meeting that due consideration will need to be given to the emerging recommendations from the Local Government Reform Joint Forum on staff transfer schemes.

Members will note that a further detailed report will be brought back to Committee in due course for consideration.

***c. Capital Expenditure Programme/Estate Strategy***

Shared recognition of the need to jointly consider the current and potential future investment plans of the three councils insofar as it affects those areas transferring to Belfast. Agreed that Lisburn and Castlereagh would prepare a joint report detailing the various capital expenditure projects, and associated sources of finance, planned over the next three years for those areas transferring to Belfast City Council.

**2.2.2 Phase II Work-plan – For Members Consideration**

***d. Statutory Transition Committee***

Awaiting guidance to be issued by the DoE regarding the establishment of Statutory Transition Committees (STC) and the composition of the Belfast STC.

***e. Rate Convergence***

Noted that work is underway at a regional level to explore what options exist to alleviate any potential rates convergence issues across merging councils. Recognition that work would be required with Land and Property Services to establish a firm understanding of rating issues across the three council areas.

***f. Service Convergence***

Recognition of the need to ensure service continuity for residents throughout and after the boundary changes and the need to effectively plan for this. Suggested that this work be deferred pending progression of Phase I work-streams (assets/liabilities and staffing issues).

***g. Joint Officer Engagement***

It order to progress transition matters, it was recommended that joint officer engagement be focused on finance and HR matters in the first instance

***h. Social Investment Fund (SIF)***

Noted that all three Councils were represented on the SIF Investment Zones affecting their areas and that joint Council consultation was required in order to ensure effective co-ordination of any associated funding bids

***i. Communications***

The importance of joint communications was highlighted and it was agreed that work would be taken forward on the development of a joint communications strategy.

**3.0 Resource Implications**

There are no financial or HR implications contained within this report.

**4.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to

- (i) note the contents of this report; and
- (ii) consider and endorse the draft minute of the joint political meeting on 11 December 2012 subject to further detailed reports being submitted for the consideration of the Committee on each of the key workstreams identified.”

After discussion, during which the Chief Executive answered a number of questions in relation to the transfer of assets from Castlereagh and Lisburn to Belfast, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Statutory Transition Committee  
Consultation Event**

The Committee was advised that correspondence had been received from the Department of the Environment seeking authority for the use of the City Hall as a venue for a consultation event in relation to Statutory Transition Committees. The Department was planning to run a series of targeted consultation events across Northern Ireland between 4th and 8th February. The events would be focused on the introduction of Statutory Transition Committees and their associated legislative and policy proposals. During the event the Environment Minister's intention in respect of Statutory Transition Committees would be outlined, whilst it would also provide a forum for local government representatives to express their views on such Committees.

The Committee granted authority to the Department of the Environment for the use of the Great Hall for the event to be held on 7th February, 2013 from 9.30 a.m. till 12.30 p.m.

**Local Government Reform –  
Staff Transfer Scheme For Civil Servant Staff**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Relevant Background Information**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that as part of the local government reform programme, it is proposed that a number of key functions such as planning and regeneration will transfer from central to local government with a number of civil service staff transferring with these functions.
- 1.2 The exact number and type of staff to transfer is still to be defined, with work underway in this area through the established Transfer of Functions Working Group. It is estimated that the potential numbers who may transfer to Belfast City Council could exceed 150 staff, primarily linked to planning and regeneration related functions.
- 1.3 The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), who is legally responsible for NI Civil Service staff, is however currently giving active consideration to the model transfer scheme which would be applied for the transfer of civil service staff to local government as part of the reform process.

**2.0 Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Environment Minister has written to each of the Chairs of the Voluntary Transition Committees, seeking initial views of local government on the proposed model transfer scheme for civil servant staff. A copy of the correspondence received has

been circulated. The Environment Minister intends to relay the feedback received from local government to DFP to inform its considerations on this important matter.

- 2.2 The Environment Minister states in his correspondence that the proposed starting point being considered for the Civil Service staff transfer scheme is the model applied by DHSSPS during the reform of the Health sector and currently being used as the basis for Civil Service transfers in the Education sector. This model contains a two-tiered approach whereby staff would be able to choose to either:
- (i) permanently transfer from the civil service to importing organisations under TUPE-type arrangements; or
  - (ii) go to importing organisations on a temporary transfer basis with a 3-year right of return to the Civil Service, subject to a post being available.
- 2.3 Should the above approach be adopted in relation to staff transferring from central government to local government there are a number of potential issues relating to the potential impact of introducing an up to three -year return policy in terms. Primarily these relate to the Council's ability to deal with and plan for the following matters throughout this three year period:
- the management of different sets of employee terms of conditions of employment including staff pension schemes;
  - accommodation needs attached to the transfer of civil service staff;
  - organisational design implications including the effective integration of transferring functions and associated staff within our organisation structure and potential future service delivery models;
  - the investment in effective induction and personal development and training of transferring staff;
  - potential impact and cost of losing and replacing staff who may choose to return during the three year period; and
  - it will be important that any return of staff is negotiated in advance with Council to minimise the impact on service provision.
- 2.4 As the functions are to transfer to local government on a permanent basis, it is essential that an appropriate staffing budget (covering all associated on-costs) be transferred directly to councils from the outset to enable the effective planning and continued delivery of the functions.

- 2.5 Based on the need for further specificity on the number and types of civil service staff which may transfer to local government (including Belfast City Council) and taking account of the issues highlighted above, Members may wish to consider deferring taking a formal position until further clarification is provided and respond to the Minister on that basis. The Council should highlight also that this matter cannot be considered in isolation to the transfer of budgets and future financing model for transferring functions. It is essential that appropriate budgets (including all related staffing costs) are transferred to and managed by local government.

### **3.0 Resource Implications**

There will clearly be financial and Human Resources implications attached to the potential transfer of civil service staff to the Council within the context of local government reform and the transfer of functions. This matter will be kept under close review and the Committee will be updated accordingly.

### **4.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and consider responding to the Minister on the basis as set out at para. 2.5 above.”

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a response be forwarded to the Minister as outlined in paragraph 2.5 of the report.

Chairman