



Report to:	Belfast Voluntary Transition Committee
Subject:	Local Government Reform – Statutory Transition Committees
Date:	8 February 2013
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources
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1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	Members will be aware that it is the intention that Voluntary Transition Committees are to be given a 'Statutory' footing to take forward delivery of the local government reform programme at the local level. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 is the enabling legislation which enables the Environment Minister, by way of regulation, to create Statutory Transition Committees; defining their composition and functions.
1.2	The intention would be that Statutory Transition Committees would be brought in as soon as possible, subject to regulations being cleared through the NI Assembly, and would operate up until the Shadow Councils are put in place in June 2014. Statutory Transition Committees will be the political forum representative of those councils merging together within clusters, and will be responsible for taking forward necessary preparations for the Shadow Council coming in place in June 2014.
1.3	It is understood that the Environment Minister would wish to introduce to the Assembly the necessary regulations to bring affect to Statutory Transition Committees in early March 2013.
2.0	<u>KEY ISSUES</u>
	<i>Focus Group Events – Policy Proposals for establishing Statutory Transition Committees</i>
2.1	The Department has recently written to all councils inviting them to a series of Focus Group events, during the week commencing 4 February 2013, to discuss the policy proposals to be contained within the regulations which will bring affect to Statutory Transition Committees. One of the Focus Events is scheduled in Belfast City Hall on 7 February 2013 at 10am. A number of Members from the Belfast Voluntary Transition Committee are to attend the event in City Hall.
2.2	In order to inform discussions at the Focus Group events, the DOE has recently issued a paper, copy attached at Annex 1 , setting out a number of high-level policy proposals and posing a series of questions for consideration including, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining the core tasks to be undertaken by Statutory Transition Committees (e.g. preparing draft corporate and business plans for the STC and shadow council, preparing budget for Shadow Council) - Potential role of STCs and interface with councils in terms of disposal of land or entering into new contracts - Membership of STCs - Members' allowance for participation of STCs - Governance and procedures underpinning work of STCs - Role of STCs in the appointment process for senior staff of incoming shadow council

2.3	Members will note that when the primary legislation (i.e. Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010) had been originally adopted in 2010; it was within the context of there being no Shadow Council period be put in place and a substantive role envisaged for STCs in preparing for the incoming new 11 councils. With the now proposed introduction of Shadow Councils in June 2014, it will be important that there is clarity of role; with a core focus of Statutory Transition Committees being to take forward necessary preparatory work to enable the Shadow Councils to take decisions and progress key strands of work in to ensure the establishment and operation of the new councils in April 2015.
2.4	It is important to recognise the specific circumstances of the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee and the fact that the Council is not merging with any other council(s) but rather assimilating parts of adjacent Lisburn, Castlereagh and a small portion of North Down areas. The Council is fully aware of the importance of representation from Lisburn and Castlereagh on the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee given its role in planning for the new larger geographical area.
2.5	The policy proposals paper issued by the DOE for the Focus Group events states that the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee will be permitted to have 25 members including representation from Lisburn and Castlereagh. It is further recommended that the STCs will retain the same membership as the VTCs which in terms of Belfast VTC is currently 21 members. This would mean that there would be 4 additional members coming onto the Belfast STC from Lisburn and Castlereagh. The Council has previously agreed the position that any such representation must reflect those areas coming into the city as the STC will be planning for this area.
2.6	An initial draft Council response to the policy proposals paper issued by the DoE is attached at Annex 1 for Members consideration. A copy of this report and draft response has been circulated to those Members of the Council's Voluntary Transition Committee attending the Focus Group event on 7 February 2013. A verbal update on discussions at the Focus Group event will be provided to Members at the Committee meeting on 8 February.

3.0 Resource Implications

There will be financial and HR implications for the Council in terms of supporting the work of Statutory Transition Committees including payment of allowances for Members participation on STCs and providing officer support to the STCs.

Whilst the Environment Minister has submitted a funding bid to NI Executive seeking financial support for STCs, there has not yet been any decision in this regards. When a decision is taken by the NI Executive a further report will be submitted for the consideration of the Committee.

The working assumption in moving forward is that any financial and HR implications attached to supporting the work of the STC will be secured from within existing resources.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and note that the high-level response to the policy proposals for establishing Statutory Transition Committees, as set out at Annex 2, be submitted, subject to any amendments made by the Committee, to the Department.

5.0 Appended Documents

Annex 1 Policy proposals issued by DOE for Focus Group Events

Annex 2 Draft Council response to the DoE policy proposals