



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of Public Administration Update
Date:	14 March 2008
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, ext 6202

Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 At last month's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee it was reported that the Northern Ireland Executive had not yet considered a final RPA recommendations report. This report was to address the key issues of numbers of Councils, functions of Councils, timescale for implementation, severance arrangements, modernisation/capacity building and functional and transitional arrangements.
- 1.2 Members also noted funding decisions which had been made in the draft budget and endorsed an approach that the Council should start to develop a dialogue with central government departments on the development of pilot transitional arrangements and capacity building programmes for a number of functional areas which are likely to transfer.

Current Position

- 2.1 At the time of writing the Northern Ireland Executive has not yet considered the RPA findings paper. It has been rescheduled for consideration on a number of occasions and is presently scheduled for consideration at the Executive's meeting on 13 March. Negotiations are ongoing amongst the Party Political Groups on a number of issues and indications are that progress is being made. However if the matter is not determined by the Executive this week, it is likely that decisions will be delayed until early April as the Assembly is in recess from 15-30 March.
- 2.2 Latest intelligence indicates that serious consideration is being given to the eleven Council model and specifically Option 11B. An appendix showing a map of Option 11B is attached hereto.
- 2.3 The Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster, is still in discussion with her ministerial colleagues. In a recent meeting with the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, the DSD have indicated that they would like to explore how they might work more effectively with Councils to develop pilots over the transitional period and a number of housing regulation functions are also now due to be transferred to local government.

2.4 It is likely that the Executive, if they agree to the review programme, will apply to the Secretary of State for an extension of the length of the current Council term. Indications from the NIO are that legal advice will make it unlikely that an extended term could be granted for any longer than a year. It therefore looks increasingly likely that there will be local government elections in May 2009.

Recommendations

3.1 The Committee is asked to note the updated position.