



## Belfast City Council

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| <b>Report to:</b>         | Strategic Policy & Resources Committee                            |
| <b>Subject:</b>           | NI Assembly liaison/update  |
| <b>Date:</b>              | Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> March 2008                                |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Peter McNaney, Chief Executive                                    |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Joanne Delaney, Assistant Policy & Performance Analyst (ext 6206) |

### Relevant Background Information

This report is being brought on a monthly basis to Strategic P&R as agreed at August 2007 meeting. It provides contact and update information on the work of the Assembly to assist Members liaise with, and influence the work of, the Assembly and ensure that the interests of the city of Belfast are most effectively represented.

### Key Issues

#### 1. Belfast City Council guide to the Assembly

An updated version of this guide is available on the Members' portal.

#### 2. Official liaison with the Assembly

In order to ensure that the Council is aligned in its approach and liaison with the Assembly, it was agreed that Assembly/Ministerial updates are added as a standing item to the agenda of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and the appropriate Committees of the Council.

#### 3. Update on Assembly business

##### Updates/changes to final Budget 2008-11

Minister of the Environment answered on 15<sup>th</sup> February that the Budget 2008-11 has provided her department with additional resource funding of £4.4m (2008/09), £6.5m (2009/10) and £13m (2010/11). She explained that following proposals put to the Finance Minister and the Executive the Department had also been allocated additional Capital funding of £3.1m (200/09), £13.7m (2009/2010) and £180.2m (2010/11). This funding, which had been disclosed both in the Budget 2008-2011 document and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) will be disbursed to the councils to help them procure the waste infrastructure required to enable Northern Ireland to comply with the stringent EU Landfill Directive targets

##### Housing Affordability

- Minister for Social Development outlined the range of actions planned to take forward John Semple's recommendations from the Affordability Review

- £205million extra to tackle housing waiting lists, homelessness and affordability
- Implementation plan put in place to identify how and when Semple's recommendations will be advanced
- Final budget for 1,500 homes in year 1, 1,750 in year 2 and 2,000 in year 3

#### Rates (Regional Rates) Order NI 2008

Approved

#### Varney Review

Minister of Finance and Personnel answered on 22 Feb that Sir David Varney has requested individual meetings with Executive Members with a key role in delivering economic development policy in Northern Ireland. Ministers will then have an opportunity to submit evidence to Sir David under a covering Executive paper.

#### Older People's Commissioner

It was announced on the 18<sup>th</sup> December that OFMDFM was to create a Northern Ireland Commissioner for Older People. Consultants were appointed to undertake a review of the case for an Older People's Commissioner and will be undertaking three consultation events which will examine the possible role and remit of a Commissioner.

#### Children and Young People

All Ministers in the Executive, as well as representatives from the NIO and the Northern Ireland Court Service, have been invited to the first meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children & Young People, during which attendance at future meetings will be discussed.

#### Inter-Agency Protocol on Flags

First Minister and Deputy First Minister answered on 22 Feb that a review of the flags protocol is currently underway

#### Multi-Sports Stadium

The Committee for Culture, Arts & Leisure met and had a lengthy engagement with the Minister for Culture, Arts & Leisure on the business case report for PriceWaterhouseCoopers on the location for the proposed multi sports stadium. The committee hopes to devote a session to this in the near future.

#### Junior Minister

Appointment of new Junior Minister, Jeffrey Donaldson

#### Energy Bill

The Minister for Enterprise, trade and Investment asked the Assembly to approve the extension of the UK Energy Bill to Northern Ireland, which allows for gas storage in Northern Ireland territorial waters. The UK Government can legislate at Westminster for gas and carbon dioxide storage in Northern Ireland, however they had agreed to seek the approval of the Assembly, which was given unanimously.

### Education System

Education Minister announced on 4 March that 6 independent bodies are to be established to oversee the restructuring of the post primary school system. This is an interim arrangement to further planned changes before the establishment of the Educational Skills Authority in 2009. The Educational Skills Authority will deliver restructuring at all levels of the school system from pre-school to post primary from 2009 with the new education system to be in place by 2013.

### Community Festival Fund

Oral question to Minister for Culture and Arts on plans to transfer the administration of the Community Festivals Fund to Councils from April 2008. Work is ongoing with NILGA to facilitate the transfer. BCC has sought further clarification and information on elements of the plans.

### Regional Development Strategy

A 5 year focused assessment of the Regional Development Strategy has been completed and is being discussed with the Regional Development Committee. The Minister for Regional Development proposed to publish a report by the summer after discussion with Executive colleagues.

### Sewerage Infrastructure

Minister for Regional Development has been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that substantial investment will continue to be directed towards improving wastewater treatment and sewers, with committed expenditure of £492 million in the three year period up to 2010 together with Public Private Partnership investment of £122 million. In addition, poorly performing small wastewater treatment works serving local communities will benefit from investment of £30 million in the period up to 2014.

### Funding for Minority Ethnic Voluntary Organisations

First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced on 28 February that Voluntary Groups working with or representing minority ethnic communities are being invited to apply for funding under the minority ethnic communities funding scheme. Funding is for one year until March 2009. In the longer term, this funding will form an important part of the proposals for a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a Shared and Better Future which was announced in the Programme for Government. The funding for minority ethnic voluntary organisations will build on the current three year fund which is due to expire on the 31 March 2008.

### Reorganisation of Health and Social Care

The Minister for Health and Social Services made a statement on the reorganisation of the health and social care system in Northern Ireland and set out plans for the creation of a public health improvement agency for Northern Ireland. The proposals reflect a desire to see local councils work closely with the new structures, playing a pivotal role in developing plans to improve public health and the strengthening of the role of health and social services councils with representatives from local government.

### Review of Public Administration

In response to an Oral Question re an update on RPA, Minister of the Environment stated that the aim would be to implement RPA by 2011 provided that agreement was reached before the end of February 2008. If agreement was not reached then there would be no option but to run elections in 2009 for the 26 Councils - leaving 2013 as next target date for implementation of RPA.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

No financial implications

#### Human Resources

No HR implications

#### Asset and Other Implications

No asset or other implications

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the above report.

### **Key to Abbreviations**

N/A

### **Documents Attached**

N/A