



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	NI Assembly liaison/update
Date:	Friday 23 rd May 2008
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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

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

The Bill was introduced at its first stage on 21st April and concluded its final consideration stage on 6th May. This bill is progressing under accelerated passage.

The Minister of the Environment intends that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner will be appointed by 1st July. The Commissioner is then intended to report on the new boundaries for the 11 councils by 30th June 2009.

Racial Equality Strategy

An update on the progress of the current action plan for the Racial Equality Strategy from OFMDFM on 4th April stated that while work to fulfil the commitments in the first action plan to implement the Racial Equality Strategy continues with government departments, resources are now focused on developing and implementing the proposals of the new administration. These proposals will include arrangements for the development of an action plan covering both central and local government and

will pick up outstanding actions in the original implementation action plan. OFMDFM intend to bring the proposals forward shortly.

Post Office Closures

An Ad Hoc Committee has been set up within the Northern Ireland Assembly to consider, and make proposals for, partnerships that could enhance the economic case for viable local postal services in accordance with the Assembly resolution of 21st April 2008, and to submit a report to the Assembly by 2nd June 2008.

Varney II Review

On 30th April Sir David Varney published The Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland. The report highlighted how there is significant potential to develop the economy further, identified policy areas that need to be reassessed and structured better to assist economic growth.

Multi-Sports Stadium

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure stated that there is an indicative allocation of £70m in the current budget period of 2008-09 to 2010/11 for the proposed Multi-Sports Stadium. The Outline Business Case on the Multi-Sports Stadium remains with the Department of Finance and Personnel for scrutiny. In the event of a decision not to proceed with the stadium proposal, the Department will seek approval from the Executive to reassign this funding. The Department will look to other priorities, initially within Sport, and then within its other programmes to utilise this money. On 2nd May, the Finance Minister stated that a decision to build a stadium at the Maze should be made by the end of the month.

Litter Prevention

The Minister of the Environment has asked NILGA representatives to consult with their councils and provide their priorities for the clean neighbourhood agenda.

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

The draft bill was introduced to the Assembly on 31st March 2008 which will amend the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to make provision for a Commission for Victims and Survivors. The draft bill is being taken through the Assembly under the accelerated passage procedure and therefore is subject to approval by the Assembly. OFMDFM would like to see the new Victims and Survivors Commission put on a sound and durable legislative footing and hopes the Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill will complete its passage through the Assembly by mid-May and obtains Royal Assent in June.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill (NIA 12/07) concluded the consideration stage on 6th May.

Combating Underage Drinking

On 25th April, DHSSPS stated they has begun to develop an Action Plan as agreed by the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, and as part of the development process, officials will engage and consult with a range of key stakeholders, including the local councils, the PSNI, the local Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams (DACTs), relevant professionals, other relevant Government Departments, and community and voluntary organisations who work in this area. This process will explore and learn from the local initiatives that are currently operating, including those that have been

put in place by the local councils and the PSNI, to identify best practice and to ensure a co-ordinated and evidenced based approach can be taken across Northern Ireland.

No Drinking Areas

The Minister for Social Development stated on 18th April new powers relating to the public consumption of alcohol have been included in the draft Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 which Minister of State Paul Goggins has laid before Parliament. The measures in the draft Order, which will replace the drinking in public bye-laws, are intended to ensure that problematic drinking can be tackled on the spot in a focused and targeted way. Only those public areas where nuisance, annoyance or disorder is associated with public drinking may be designated by councils. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the draft legislation, the new provisions will come into effect when councils next designate areas that are a source of problematic drinking.

Rates Relief

Following the Executive's Domestic Rating Review in November 2007, the Lone Pensioner Allowance was introduced on 1st April By Land & Property Services.

Road Schemes Investment

On 30th April the Regional Development Minister announced an £8 million investment for the Belfast City Council area this year, focusing on a number of major and minor schemes taking place across the City.

Rapid Transport System

The report from the feasibility study commissioned by the DRD for a pilot rapid transit system for Belfast was published on 8th April. The report looked at procurement options and identified scope for contributions by private investors. Three pilot routes were also suggested for what is likely to be a bus based network rather than a Light Rail System.

Parking Schemes

The Roads Service is currently considering 11 areas in South Belfast for residents' parking schemes. The 11 areas are at various stages of the survey, design and consultation process.

The Byron Report

The Review on Safer Children in a Digital World was published on 27th March. OFMDFM have asked officials in the Children and Young People's Unit to examine Dr Byron's recommendations in detail and produce a paper on the way forward for discussion at the next meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

Public Health (Amendment) Bill

The further consideration and final consideration stages of this Bill were agreed in April. The Public Health (Amendment) Bill received Royal Assent on 6th May 2008.

Investment Conference

The NI Executive lead conference began for two days on 7th May, with over 100 leading executives from the US attending which aimed at attracting investment into Northern Ireland.

Taxis Bill

The Bill passed final consideration stage on 8th April and received Royal Assent on 21st April and became law.

Libraries Bill

The consideration stage on this Bill was completed on 6th May 2008.

Sinn Fein Reshuffle

On 7th May Sinn Féin Assembly Group Leader John O'Dowd MLA (Upper Bann) announced a reshuffle of the party's Assembly team which saw 10 of Sinn Féin's 27 MLAs changing roles.

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