



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Public Administration - Transition Committee
<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> February, 2009
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kevin Heaney, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer (ext. 6202)

<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>Relevant Background Information</u></b>
1.1	Members will recall that the Committee agreed, at its meeting on 14 <sup>th</sup> November 2008, that a letter be sent to the Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, and relevant Central Government officials outlining the proposition that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be designated as the Council's RPA Transition Committee, that the Committee comprises of 20 elected Members appointed on the basis of proportionality using D'Hondt and that an additional monthly meeting of the Committee has been designated for the purpose of RPA transition and associated change management issues.
1.2	This decision had been ratified by Council at its meeting on 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2008 and a letter had been issued to the Department of the Environment (DoE) on that basis.
1.3	Subsequently, the Chief Executive has received correspondence from the DoE, dated 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2009 (copy of which is attached at Appendix 1), confirming the Environment Minister's agreement for the Strategic Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee to act as the Council's Transition Committee and for the Transition Committee to consist of 20 members.
<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
2.1	The primary role of the Transition Committee will be to provide overall political direction and to take the necessary decisions to ensure a coherent and co-ordinated approach is taken by the Council in moving forward in the RPA transition (implementation) process.
2.2	The Review of Public Administration (RPA) process is now entering into the critical stage of implementation whereby primary legislation is being drafted, implementation structures established and active consideration being given to the transitional arrangements to be put in place to support local government reform within Northern Ireland together with ongoing transfer of functions issues.
2.3	Inevitably, the level of RPA related activity will grow in intensity and scope as we move forward with implementation and the programme of work to be taken forward by the Council's Transition Committee will evolve within this process. It will be important that we make a distinction between the business to be discussed by the RPA Transition Committee and the normal business of the SP&R Committee.
2.4	Accordingly, with effect from March 2009 that any items of a transitional nature will be earmarked as transition items and will be minuted under a Transition Committee heading.
2.5	As time goes on, it might be that the amount of business which the Transition Committee will be required to conduct will be such that it will be necessary for a whole meeting to be dedicated to transitional business.
2.6	If the Committee were minded to accept this proposal it would provide the greatest flexibility in ordering the business of the SP&R and Transition Committee over the next 12 months. Clearly there will be a need for some flexibility to be built into this process to ensure that important issues can be addressed in a timely matter as they emerge.

2.7	It order to formally cement the role of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as the Council's Transition Committee, it would be the intention that a detailed report would be brought to the first meeting of SP&R on 6 <sup>th</sup> March, as the Council's Transition Committee, setting out the role and responsibilities of the Transition Committee and its legal status; governance and management arrangements; anticipated initial programme of work and associated timeline; engagement mechanisms with the Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee etc.
	<b><u>Legal Status</u></b>
2.8	Whilst the Transition Committee will operate on a voluntary basis initially, its role will evolve over the coming months as it starts to lay the foundations in preparation for the new Council post May 2011. The Department of the Environment intends to make enabling provisions for statutory Transition Committees in the Local Government (Finance) Bill, with a planned operative date of no later than April 2010. This will be explored in further detail at the meeting on 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2009.
	<b><u>Members' Remuneration</u></b>
2.9	In recognition of the additional responsibility involved, members of the Council's Transition Committee will be paid an allowance of <u>£2,700 per annum</u> (pro rata for 2008/2009). This will be grant funded by the Department of the Environment (DoE) and payments will be allocated within the Council on the same basis as the payment of Special Responsibility allowances.
2.10	Enclosed at Appendix 2 is a letter of offer received from the DoE in regards to Departmental Funding for Transition Committees. <u>Approval is sought for the Chief Executive to confirm acceptance of the letter of offer on behalf of the Council's Transition Committee (i.e. Strategic Policy and Resources Committee).</u>
2.11	Given the fact that the SP&R Committee has meet over the last number of months to discuss RPA matters under the auspices of its role as the Council's Transition Committee, a request has been submitted to the DoE seeking agreement that the commencement date of the Council's Transition Committee was January 2009 and that the payment of Members' allowances would be effective from that date. Whilst we are still await formal approval from the DoE, initial discussions with senior Departmental officials has been positive.
	<b><u>Engagement with Lisburn/Castlereagh Transition Committee</u></b>
2.12	Appropriate engagement mechanisms need to be put in place with the Transition Committee for Lisburn and Castlereagh to enable constructive discussions on relevant RPA transitional issues. It is proposed that a letter be sent from the Chair of the SP&R Committee, on behalf of the Council's Transition Committee, to the Castlereagh and Lisburn Transition Committee informing them of the establishment of the Belfast Transition Committee and seeking dialogue around necessary engagement mechanisms.
	<b><u>Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery</u></b>
2.12	Members will note that PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has been recently appointed by the Department of the Environment to undertake an assessment of options for local government service delivery and to make recommendations as to the development of effective and efficient models for the future delivery of key functions (e.g. planning, urban regeneration, community development, local economic development and public realm aspects of local roads functions) transferring from central government to the 11 new Councils (a copy of the Terms of Reference is attached at Appendix 3).
2.13	This will entail carrying out an economic appraisal embracing a range of models which include delivery of services directly by the 11 councils, on a group basis or on a regional basis. Such an assessment must take account of the new community planning and power of well-being responsibilities of councils and should be underpinned by the core principles of strong Local Government; the role of Local Government in supporting place shaping; the need for single point accountability at the local level; ensuring improved customer centric services; and value for money considerations. Whilst affordability will clearly be an important consideration within this

	process, it must not be the key driver for the recommendations which emerge.
2.14	Without wanting to pre-empt the options to be put forward as part of this work, arguments may emerge in regards to shared services for specific operational areas such as, for example, HR, ICT, Legal Services and others. Clearly the Council will need to consider these on an individual basis and within the context of its own transformation agenda. Consideration will need to be given to the advantages or otherwise for the organisation.
2.15	In regards to any discussions and consideration given to future delivery models around the key transferring functions (e.g. planning, urban regeneration etc), it is important that the aforementioned principles and the place shaping role of the Council are not compromised. Accordingly, it is recommended for Members consideration that the Council take a position that those key transferring functions which contribute to the broader place shaping and community planning agenda of the Council including, for example, planning, urban regeneration, community development, local economic development and public realm aspects of local roads functions, be anchored within and delivered by the Council. It is further proposed that this should be the position on which the Council engages with the PWC work.

### 3.0 Resource Implications

3.1	Whilst Members of the Council's Transition Committee will be paid £2,700 annual allowance (pro-rata), this will be Grant Funded from the Department of Environment and will have no financial implications for the Council.
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### 4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) agree that, as required, SP&R will meet in a formal capacity as the Council's Transition Committee with effect from the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2009;
- b) agree that a detailed report in regards to the role and remit of the Council's Transition Committee be considered at the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March;
- c) agree that items of a transitional nature be earmarked as transition items and minuted accordingly;
- d) agree that the Chair of SP&R write to the Transitional Committee for Lisburn and Castlereagh seeking early dialogue in regards to engagement mechanisms;
- e) agree that the Chief Executive can confirm acceptance of the letter of offer; and
- f) consider and agree that the Council take a position that those key transferring functions which contribute to the broader place shaping and community planning agenda of the Council be anchored within and delivered by the Council (refer to section 2.15) .

### Documents Attached

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Confirmation from the Department of the Environment
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Letter of Offer – Departmental Funding for Transition Committees/Management Teams
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Terms of Reference for Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery

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