



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Transition Committee
Date:	20th November, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services
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Relevant Background Information

Transition Committees have been established and are operating on a voluntary basis.

The previous Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, gave approval for the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to be designated as Belfast's Review of Public Administration Transition Committee.

There has been engagement by officers and Members from Belfast with the Castlereagh/Lisburn Transition Committee to discuss issues of mutual concern in relation to the run up to the implementation of the Review of Public Administration.

Key Issues

The draft Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill makes provision for the setting up of Statutory Transition Committees. Emerging from this Bill, the new Environment Minister, Edwin Poots, will have the power to make directions in regard to the establishment and membership of the Statutory Transition Committees.

While the Council has already submitted a response to the Bill, there are a number of points which it would be important to make at this stage of the process.

- 1) In considering the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, the Committee for the Environment agreed that there must be direct political representation from Castlereagh and Lisburn Councils on the incoming Belfast 'Statutory' Transition Committee. Department of the Environment officials have been tasked with working up the mechanism and model through which this representation will be secured and the Minister will be issuing instructions in this regard.
- 2) Since the proposed areas to be transferred do not consist of complete Electoral Areas and in some cases include only portions of existing Wards, there is no clear means to identify the political make-up of these areas. It is important that Councillors from Castlereagh and Lisburn appointed to the Belfast Transition Committee should represent, as far as possible, the

political makeup of the areas to be transferred. Such representation would have to be determined by the two Councils concerned.

- 3) All Members of the Transition Committee will enjoy full voting rights.
- 4) There should be no dual membership of Transition Committees.
- 5) To date, the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has acted as the Belfast Transition Committee but the legislative requirements for the appointment of the Statutory Transition Committee are likely to require that the Committee will have to be reconstituted on a one-off basis and for a period to run until the Local Government Elections currently scheduled to be held in May, 2011.

Options for Representation on the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee

The Boundaries Commission recommendations (which have yet to be confirmed) would result in an anticipated change in electorate which would see Belfast increase from approximately 158,000 (currently) to 190,400 (post RPA). This represents an increase in the Council's electorate of approximately 17%.

Early indications from Department of the Environment officials are that Belfast would be permitted to retain its current number of representatives on the Transition Committee (that is, twenty Members) and that the representation from Castlereagh and Lisburn Councils would be additional to this. It has been suggested that the additional representation from Castlereagh and Lisburn Councils would be either two or three Members. This would result in a Belfast Transitional Committee comprising either 24 or 26 Members.

The additional Membership from the other two Council areas could reasonably be based on the percentage electorate to be transferred to Belfast.

The electorate within the proposed additional areas to be transferred are:-

14,000 (approx.) from Castlereagh

18,400 (approx) from Lisburn

Representation from Castlereagh and Lisburn Councils on the new Belfast Council would, as has already been mentioned, comprise approximately 17% of the total electorate of the proposed new Council area. The breakdown of this representation in terms of the electorate would be approximately for Belfast 158,000 (82.99%), for Castlereagh 14,000 (7.35%) and for Lisburn 18,400 (9.66%).

Accordingly, based on the electorate to be transferred, the number of representatives from Castlereagh should be 1.76 (rounded up to 2) and from Lisburn should be 2.32 (rounded down to 2). This would result in a Belfast Transition Committee of 24 Members. However, the Department of the Environment officials have indicated that it is likely that 3 Members may be appointed from each of the other Councils, which would mean that 26 Members would sit on Belfast Transition Committee, resulting in a significant minority of Members from outside Belfast. The justification which there might be for this level of representation is not clear, but the final decision will rest with the Minister.

The political balance of the Committee will of necessity be affected by the inclusion of representatives from the other two Councils.

All options would require a review of the membership and governance arrangements for the Transition Committee. Issues such as a protocol for Council ratification of decisions, delegation of decision making, and election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman will require to be addressed.

Resource Implications

None.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the comments set out in this report be forwarded to the Minister for the Environment requesting that he consider the points raised when issuing direction on the appointment of the Statutory Transition Committee for Belfast.

Decision Tracking

Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services
2nd December, 2009

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