

RPA Transfer of Functions Discussions

Malone House

19th November 2009

Workshop Report

In attendance

Gerry Millar	Belfast City Council
Sharon McNicholl	Belfast City Council
Emer Husbands	Belfast City Council
Kevin Heaney	Belfast City Council
Jackie Johnson	DSD
Elaine Wilkinson	DSD
Neil Dunlop	DoE: Planning
Tom McCourt	DRD: Roads Service

1. Background

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- i. establish a shared understanding of the functions proposed to Transfer to Belfast City Council
- ii. examine the current governance and support structures in place for the proposed transferring functions
- iii. identify those key transfer issues which need to be addressed and agree a process for how they could be effectively taken forward
- iv. agree key actions and next steps to ensure that the necessary momentum is maintained

Each stakeholder gave a presentation (copies attached at Annex 1) setting out a brief overview of their role and remit, organisational structures and highlighting any issues which they felt needed to be addressed in moving forward with the proposed transfer of functions to the Council

2. Belfast City Council Overview

- G. Millar provided an overview of the current challenges facing the Council in terms of the current financial pressures (both internal and external) facing the organisation and moving forward with the RPA process and the current uncertainties which are inherent in the process.
- Explained that the Council are going through a process of rightsizing and restructuring to ensure that it can drive out additional efficiencies which can sustain improvements in front-line service provision.
- Provided an overview of the current organisational structure and political governance arrangements in place within the Council and the respective roles of the Council, Standing Committees and Departments.

- Stated that the Council is eager to work with the transferring function departments to ensure the most efficient and effective transfer of functions and maximise possible synergies which can be achieved through this process. He explained that there are a number of common principles which we should all seek to achieve as part of the process e.g.
 - **Providing strong local government** with service performance and costs of delivery in line with national best practice;
 - **Adding value for citizens** with increased citizen confidence and increased participation in local democracy;
 - **Attracting developing and retaining high quality and dedicated staff** with increased satisfaction levels and reduced staff turnover;
 - **Providing service excellence** with increased citizen satisfaction with services and value for money;
 - **Providing value for money** with minimum rate increases and decreased costs.
- Explained that over recent years the Council has introduced a new corporate planning process and performance management system which underpins how services are delivered by the Council.
- Through the Value Creation Map process the Council seeks to maximise the added value it brings within the city and to improving the quality of life for citizens. It provides a framework which encourages greater integration across the organisation to deliver common priorities and goals.
- Through the corporate planning work, it has become clear that the strategic direction of the organisation has changed from predominantly functional service delivery to one whereby the Council now organises itself more effectively to work on a thematic basis to address issues such as safety, health improvement and wellbeing etc, as well as at a local (area-based) level.
- This means planning and allocating resources in new ways and has consequences in terms of how Members hold officers to account for delivery. It will require greater integration across the organisation.
- In terms of moving forward, the following were identified as key issues which need to be progressed:
 - **Transfer** - in terms of functions, budgets, people and assets?
 - **Resources** – sustainability of funding (e.g. CSR, income based)
 - **People** – process through which staff will transfer?
 - **Assets/Accommodation** – identification of the accommodation requirements
 - **Capacity Building** – for Members and officers crucial e.g. joint training

- **Alignment & Prioritisation** – of policies, strategies and programmes – need to manage expectations as we cannot afford to over-promise and under-deliver
- **Corporate Support Systems** – what systems, processes & procedures
- **Commitments** – we can only effectively plan if we know what commitments are in place e.g. current or planned capital/revenue
- **Brigading of services** - how will transferring functions be assimilated within the council?

3. Belfast Regeneration Office

- Elaine Wilkinson provided an overview of the current structural and governance arrangements of the organisation (refer to Annex 1)
- Explained that there are 5 Deputy Directors (Grade 7) in place overseeing a 1) Physical Development Branch; 2) 3 Area-based Teams (i.e. West, South & East Team, North and Greater Shankill Team); and 3) a Business Support Unit.
- The **Physical Development Branch** (lead by Mark O'Donnell) oversees the major projects and regeneration schemes. Also responsible for the Urban Development Grants, Environmental Improvements schemes and would oversee the development of Masterplans and Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.
- DSD has recently established an interim 'Service Delivery Model Project Team' which is examining the lessons learnt through the Neighbourhood Renewal programme and the legacy of NR projects. Seeking to identify best practice in regard to impact and outcomes. This will inform the future prioritisation of projects and allocation of funding which is particularly important within the current financial climate and the uncertainty with regard to the CSR funding process.
- Suggested that consideration should be given to the feasibility and potential benefits of establishing a centre of excellence within Belfast City Council around programme/project management.
- Each of the **Area-Based Teams** has a designated neighbourhood renewal officer. They would be responsible for developing smaller scale projects and capital schemes which are transferred over to the Physical Development branch when they are of a certain scale.
- Noted that funding for Neighbourhood Renewal is issued by the Department on a grant basis.
- DSD would be keen to work more collaboratively with other statutory service providers and maximise any potential for joint projects.
- Noted that under the current recommendations put forward by the independent boundary commissioners with regard to the new Belfast City Council boundary two additional neighbourhood renewal areas will come into Belfast i.e. Colin Glenn (West Belfast) and Tullycarnet (East Belfast). This will bring the total of DSD designated neighbourhood renewal areas within Belfast to 15.

- Noted that DSD is currently reviewing its strategy and policy framework for urban regeneration and community development being transferred. This may have potential implications for the future allocation and prioritising of funding.
- Noted that the future of the Belfast Area Partnership Boards is currently under review by the Department. Contract was extended by 8months to March 2011 with reviews at 6 month intervals.
- Noted that a review of community and partnership structures will need to be undertaken within the context of any future developments with Community Planning.
- The **Business Support Unit** provides the necessary oversight and administrative support across all the programme areas delivered by the department. Provides the necessary checks and balances in terms of due process.
- Noted that under the current accounting arrangements within central government a large range of support services and accommodation costs are funded administered centrally. Standard corporate support functions such as HR and ICT are provided centrally through HR Direct and IT Assist. How such costs are paid for in the future needs to be examined further within the context of transfer of functions.
- The status of offices currently used to house those DSD staff who will transfer will need to be determined.
- Noted that consideration will need to be given to the realignment of resources within each organisation to support the implementation of the project plan and key actions contained therein.
- Working on the premise that no additional resources would be made available to support the transfer of functions process but rather, capacity would be made available through the realignment/refocusing of existing resources.

Staff Transfer

- Whilst no final decision has been taken in regard to conditions on which civil service staff will transfer to local government, consideration will need to be given to how salaries are processed and whether or not councils will need access to HR Direct.
- Working on the current assumption that the majority of DSD staff will transfer to councils.
- **Key issues** which need to be progressed as part of the project plan include the transfer of: people, money, accommodation, assets and possible project/programme commitments.

4. Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate

- Jackie Johnson outlined the organisation structure for the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate (BCCRD).

- Set out the policy context which underpins the work of the BCCRD and highlighted the fact that the Regional Development Strategy acknowledged the regional significance of Belfast City Centre as a key economic driver for the region.
- BCCRD was established to drive forward the regeneration of Belfast City Centre. In 2004 the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy was published which was originally a 10year strategy.
- Noted that almost 50-60% of the strategy has been completed to date, however, the remaining elements are likely to extend the strategy to a 15-20year period.
- Explained that there are 4 Directorates dealing with the key strands of work of BCCRD e.g:
 - Royal Exchange
 - Belfast Streets Ahead, City Centre Promotion and Nomadic
 - City Centre Policy, Masterplanning
 - Laganside and Cathedral Quarter
- Group was informed that the Department is nearing signing a development agreement for Royal Exchange which will mirror somewhat the approach adopted for the Victoria Square development. Noted that there was 15 staff had been designated to working on the Victoria Square project when at its peak.
- Highlighted the fact that BCCRD also have the ability to commit capital seed funding to pump-prime additional investment within the City Centre.

City Centre Planning/Master planning

- DSD has adopted a sequential/phasing approach to taking forward regeneration activity within the city centre.
- Whilst the majority of master planning work is nearing completion, there is a need for focused work for the South East Quarter of the City Centre.
- Consideration will need to be given to the transition process for projects/schemes which bridge the 2011 proposed transfer date. The early engagement of the Council in the developmental stages of such schemes would support a more efficient and effective handover and strengthen the sustainability of such projects.

Capital schemes / regeneration projects

- In terms of the transition process, consideration will need to be given to the process to be put in place to effectively manage the assignment of agreements/contracts to successor organisations and the assignment of agreements/contracts to Councils where boundary changes mean that the future council custodian of a project changes.

Asset Transfer

- Detailed consideration will need to be given to the process to be put in place to enable the migration of asset registers and necessary supporting information.

Laganside Estate

- It is the intention that all commercial contracts in relation to the Laganside Estate (approx. 12) will be handed over to the Council.
- The Laganside Estate comprises of Lagan, Cathedral Quarter, Queens Quay, with an annual budget of £4million approximately.
- Noted that a master planning exercise is underway in relation to the Queens Quay and a bridges strategy is being developed for the lagan.

5. DoE Planning Service – Belfast Divisional Planning Office

- Neil Dunlop provided an overview of the current structural and governance arrangements for the Belfast Divisional Planning Office.
- Noted that the Divisional Office currently covers three district council areas including Belfast, Castlereagh, and Newtownabbey.
- Noted that there are two planning teams focusing primarily on Belfast i.e. South & East Team (lead by Paul Montgomery) and North & West Team (lead by David Dowey). There is also an enforcement team (lead by Susan Wilkin) which has responsibility for the Belfast area.
- Noted that there was a recent reorganisation of the Divisional Officers with the centralisation of the Strategic Planning Directorate (including BMAP Team). Consideration is being given to the consolidation of the relevant parts of this Directorate back into the Divisional Officers pre-transfer.

Functions

- The following functions are proposed to transfer to local government:
 - local development planning, which replaces the current Area Plan arrangements;
 - development management (formerly known as development control) and
 - enforcement.

Other responsibilities will include:

- conservation area designation / consents.;
- temporary listing of buildings, including non-statutory local listing and control of demolition or works to listed buildings (following consultation with the Department);
- dealing with hazardous substances consent; reviewing old minerals permissions; control of advertisements; tree preservation orders; issuing completion notices; preparing simplified planning zone schemes;
- revoking, modifying or discontinuing planning permissions and consents;
- compensation liabilities arising from district council planning functions;
- responding to purchase and blight notices; issuing certificates of alternative development value; and
- maintaining a register of applications, consents, notices, certificates etc.

Following the transfer of powers to local government, the Department will retain responsibility for:-

- planning policy and guidance;
- planning legislation;
- processing regionally significant planning applications;
- fee setting and the power to make grants;
- applications for Crown or other development where national security issues are raised or urgent works are necessary;
- performance management / monitoring; and
- oversight.

Staff and Support

- Working on the assumption that the majority of professional staff will transfer to councils. Further consideration will need to be given to the transfer arrangements to be put in place for business support and administration staff and the conditions on which they would transfer.
- Under the current structure there are approximately 50-60 staff dealing with Belfast planning related work.
- There are 20 additional administrative and support staff based in the Belfast Divisional Office, however, they also provide support to Castlereagh and Newtownabbey.
- Many of the corporate support functions are split across four tiers within DoE Planning Service e.g:-
 1. **Within Divisional Office** - Registry, Finance, Processing, Correspondence
 2. **From HQ** - Professional Guidance, Audit, Communications, IT systems
 3. **From DoE** - Press Office, HR
 4. **From NICS** - IT Assist, HRConnect, AccountNI,

Resources

- Traditionally the Planning Service was a self-financed primarily through planning application fees. However, it should be noted that fee income has dropped over the recent period to reflect the economic downturn. This has placed a resource constraint (funding deficit) on Planning Service and must be factored into the transfer.

Governance

- Consideration will need to be given to the necessary governance (including legal considerations) which need to be put in place within councils to deliver the planning function. Consideration will also need to be given to the potential impact on schemes of delegation.

Estates/Location Issues

- Key issues here include the location of the planning functions on day one, integration with council premises, cost issues around total on-costs.

IT Systems Issues

- Planning Service is presently in late testing stages of the e-PIC project, which will be implemented in 2010/11. Consideration will need to be given to how the system will be integrated with new council systems. In terms of Management Information Systems, further consideration needs to be given to the interface between Local Government and the retained planning function in the centre in terms of sharing relevant information.
- Planning is a core element of the NI Direct initiative and, at present, local government is not part of this.

Capacity Building

- This will be an ongoing process which has already started through PS partnership with RTPI in recent events. Two strand approach – need roll out internal PS training in preparation for the planning reforms, while working closely with the local government sector (e.g. Transition Committees, Transition Management Teams, NILGA, SOLACE etc) to ensure a programme of capacity building and awareness is carried out. The timing of elected member capacity building must consider the expected turnover of member at election and through member severance if taken forward.

7. DRD Road Service

- Tom McCourt set out the policy and strategic context underpinning the work of the Roads Service including the Regional Development Strategy 2025 and Regional Transportation Strategy 2012. He explained that the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 covers Belfast.

Transferring Functions

The following functions are to transfer to local government:

1. Off Street Car Parking

- Responsibility for the management and ownership of these assets are to transfer to local government.

2. On Street Parking

- This includes Residents Parking Zones – these Zones will be approved by DRD and enforced by Councils via the NSL contract
- Policy responsibility for deciding on-street parking regulations will remain with DRD.

3. Car Parking Enforcement

- Enforcement activity is currently managed through contracts with NSL and SPUR (IT support).

- Both contracts are due to expire in October 2010 but there is an option to extend (+1year +1year)
- Local Government sector need to decide how it wishes to progress this contract or the commencement of a new procurement process. This issue is being considered by the RPA Transfer of Functions Working Group and will be decided by the Strategic Leadership Board.

4. Pedestrian Permits

- Policy Guidelines relating to the authorisation of pedestrian permits will transfer to Local Government and can be altered at a local level subject to observation of the due legislative process
- Enforcement of unauthorised stationary vehicles in pedestrian zones is currently handled as part of the existing NSL Enforcement Contract

5. Local Events on Roads

- Responsibility for permitting local events on roads and taking necessary actions to enable this e.g. temporary closer of a local road

6. Alley Gating

- This facility is only applicable to adopted alleys but Councils may receive applications for non adopted alleys
- This is primarily a Belfast issue but there are some in Londonderry & elsewhere in the Province
- The organisation of the scheme & associated costs are borne by the promoter in the community
- DRD currently has limited input – approval & issue of Traffic Regulation Order – but will still need to be consulted and will have final say

7. Influencing Model

- The DRD Minister has given a commitment that “local government will have formal and direct input into the local roads decision making process”.
- Work is currently underway between officials from local and central government to develop a model that best achieves this e.g.
 - **Capital:** Councils will influence capital expenditure on local roads and local transport and safety measures (e.g. Collision Remedial, Cycle Lanes, and Traffic Calming etc.)
 - **Maintenance:** RS will retain / enhance our contacts and negotiations on maintenance expenditure with Councils as at present. However, councils will not formally influence the maintenance programmes for local roads, which will be based on engineering decisions.
- The future relationship between the Roads Service and Councils needs to be considered within the context of the emerging community planning process and

the linkage between local community plans and wider area based spatial development plans.

- **Key issues** which need still need to be addressed in terms of the transfer of functions to local government is how the resources are to be disaggregated and the issue of cross-subsidisation is dealt with.

Next Steps

- Accepted that we cannot do everything at once.
- Need to jointly plan the way forward (route map) which sets out the key actions which need to be addressed.
- Consideration will need to be given to the realignment of resources & capacity within each organisation to support the implementation of the agreed joint project plan and key actions contained therein.
- Noted that the project plan needs to identify and prioritise those issues which can be progressed and those which cannot at this stage e.g. confirmation of future funding.