



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources (Transition) Committee
Subject:	Review of Public Administration Update
Date:	21 st May 2010
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, RPA Coordination Manager (ext. 6202)

1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	Members will be aware of the ongoing discussions within the NI Executive in regards to the Review of Public Administration and how the reform of local government within Northern Ireland will be progressed. It is understood that there remains an absence of decision on important implementation issues including, for example, the new local government boundaries and how the reform programme will be funded.
	<u>Key Issues</u>
1.2	The Environment Minister intended to submit a report to the Executive, at its meeting on 13 th May 2010, setting out options on a proposed way forward for the RPA. As it happens, the report did not actually appear on the agenda.
1.3	It is understood that the report indicated that the reform of local government as currently proposed (particularly the reorganisation of councils from 26 to 11) is no longer deliverable by May 2011 and should be postponed until 2015. Two options had been outlined for Ministerial consideration:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Option 1:</i> reorganisation of councils postponed until 2015 with shadow councils being put in place from 2014. Consideration to be given to the interim transfer of some functions (e.g. Planning, DSD functions and the duty off Community Planning) to councils from 2011 onwards. ○ <i>Option 2:</i> reorganisation of councils and transfer of functions deferred until 2015 with consideration given to potential shadow period being introduced from 2014.
1.4	Any postponement or reconfiguration made to the RPA programme requires Executive approval.
1.5	There has been considerable media speculation and discussion within the Executive over recent months in regards to the RPA. Attached at Appendix 1 is an extract from Hansard outlining the Environment Minister's responses to RPA related questions raised within the Assembly on 11 th May 2010.
1.6	As previously agreed by the Committee, a letter has been sent to the Environment Minister (copy attached at Appendix 2) outlining the Council's concerns regarding the continued delay and absence of decisions around the RPA and seeking an urgent announcement on the way forward.
1.7	A verbal update will be provided at the SP&R Committee meeting on 21 st May, on any further RPA developments since the report was drafted.

<i>Collaboration and Efficiency</i>	
2.8	Members will be aware of the recent discussions in regards to how local government would intend to take forward the creation of a service-delivery model that would provide efficiencies through collaboration. This work was initiated in response to the sector's strong opposition to the proposed establishment of a centralised Business Services Organisation.
2.9	The local government proposed approach outlined in the paper ' <i>A Practical Approach to Securing Local Government Efficiencies and Improvements through Collaboration</i> ' (copy attached at Appendix 3) was accepted in principle by the Environment Minister at the Strategic Leadership Board meeting of 14 April 2010. The Minister indicated, however, that further work was now required on the detail of the proposals put forward in regards to delivering efficiencies through voluntary collaboration.
2.10	It is understood that the Environment Minister is minded, in moving forward with a reconfigured RPA programme, to place a greater focus on securing efficiencies within local government. A detailed business case and work programme needs to be developed which clearly sets out how a local government efficiency agenda may be taken forward.
2.11	As previously agreed by the Committee, Council officials are engaged in the ongoing discussions on this issue and will ensure that Members are kept fully updated as it moves forward. Members will note that work is underway to identify and explore the potential collaborative opportunities which may exist to the Council as part of its wider efficiency programme which has already recognised collaboration as one approach. Within this context, it would be the intention to also explore the potential opportunities with other statutory service providers within the city as part of a total place approach.
2.12	The current financial pressures facing the local government and wider public sector will undoubtedly act as a compelling driver for encouraging greater collaboration where real benefits, greater value for money and efficiencies can be demonstrated at no detriment to councils.
2.13	Any collaborative approach or models put in place should be subject to a robust value for money test for participant councils and, therefore, the Council will reserve the right to be autonomous in moving forward.

3.0 Resource Implications

There will clearly be resource implications (in terms of officer time) attached to the Council's continued engagement and work on the key issues outlined within this report.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Hansard report on Assembly discussion, 11th May 2010

Appendix 2: Correspondence to Environment Minister, dated 22nd April 2010

Appendix 3: SLB report, 14th April 2010: '*A Practical Approach to Securing Local Government Efficiencies and Improvements through Collaboration*'