

Belfast City Council



Your reference

Our reference RPA/004

Date 4 June 2010

Mr Edwin Poots MLA
Minister of the Environment
Department of the Environment
Private Office
Room 717
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST BT2 8GB

Dear Minister

PROGRESSING THE DELIVERY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

I refer to your letter, dated 28 May 2010, which sought confirmation from the Council, and wider local government sector, if it would be willing to fund the upfront costs of the RPA reform programme.

Belfast City Council gave initial consideration to this matter at its Council meeting on Tuesday 1 June and subsequently at a meeting of its Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 4 June.

The Council confirms its commitment to Local Government reform and its desire to work productively with others to ensure that responsive, integrated and value for money services are delivered at a local level to its ratepayers. As you will be aware as Minister; the Council has already invested significant resources and effort into the RPA process over the last number of years.

In this vein, the Council states its willingness to explore with colleagues in local and central government how the costs of reform might be met.

In giving consideration to this issue, the Council would be guided by the following principles:

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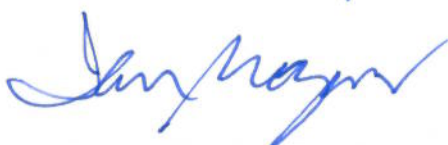
- (a) any financial contribution made by the Council would be proportionate to the direct costs incurred by the Council in implementing the reform programme;
- (b) any financial commitment to the efficiency programme for local government will only be made on the basis of VFM being demonstrated for Belfast ratepayers;
- (c) the Belfast ratepayer should not be asked to subsidise the convergence costs of other council areas;
- (d) transferring functions should be rate neutral at point of transfer to councils.

The Council would note also that there remain a number of issues outside of the control of local government and which need to be progressed by the NI Executive to allow the reform process to move on. These include:-

- Ensuring that the required legislation (including the Local Government Boundaries Order and Reorganisation Bill) are in place;
- Resolving the rates convergence issue of amalgamating councils
- Ensuring the transferring functions are rates neutral at the point of transfer
- Ensuring the necessary practical arrangements are in place for example Land and Property Services systems and processes are aligned to the 11 council model.

Finally, the Council would urge you as Minister with responsibility for local government and your Executive colleagues to urgently provide the necessary clarity on the future of the reform programme for local government.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Crozier
Chairman of Belfast Voluntary Transition Committee

CC:

All Councillors of Belfast City Council

Councillor John Mathews, President, Northern Ireland Local Government Association