



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources (Transition) Committee
Subject:	Review of Public Administration Status Update
Date:	3 June 2011
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, (ext. 6202)

1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	<p>In 2002 the Northern Ireland Executive initiated the Review of Public Administration (RPA) with the aim of modernising how public services are provided in Northern Ireland. As part of this review, the NI Executive took the decision in 2008 to reduce the number of Councils from 26 to 11 new larger councils and to transfer a number of new functions from central government departments to local government (a list of the current proposals is attached at Appendix 1 albeit any future transfer proposals will remain subject to consideration by the new Executive).</p>
1.2	<p>Under the RPA proposals and as a result of the recommendations put forward by the independent local government boundary commissioner, Mr Dick McKenzie, it is proposed that the new Belfast City Council boundary incorporates a small part of the adjacent Lisburn and Castlereagh areas; with the city's population increasing from 268,000 to over 300,000.</p>
1.3	<p>Whilst the initial timetable for RPA sought to have the new 11 councils in place and operational from the May 2011 elections, discussions on how RPA local government reform would progress concluded on Monday 14 June 2010 with the Northern Ireland Executive not agreeing on the way forward. It is understood that there was no agreement or decision on important implementation issues including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the new local government boundaries- how the reform programme would be funded, and- the implementation timetable for reform <p>Subsequently, the May 2011 local government elections preceded on the basis of the current 26 councils and not the 11 councils as recommended under RPA. In short, the RPA has been placed in abeyance, awaiting the formation of the new NI Executive.</p>
1.4	<p>Despite the ongoing uncertainty and stop-start nature experienced with the RPA, Belfast City Council had proactively engaged in the process at both elected Member and senior officer level. The Council was represented on the regionally established RPA policy development and implementation structures and the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had been designated as the Belfast RPA voluntary Transition Committee and was given responsibility for overseeing, coordinating and managing the Council's own preparations for RPA.</p>
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	<p>It is understood that the new Environment Minister Alex Attwood seeks to submit, for the consideration of the NI Executive in June 2011, a paper setting out recommendations on the proposed way forward for the RPA process. Based on discussions with DoE officials, it is understood that the proposals include a 2015 timeline for the formal establishment of the new 11 councils and the transfer of functions from central to local government with a shadow council</p>

	period being introduced from 2014. A detailed report will be submitted for the future consideration of the Committee when further clarity is provided on the NI Executive's intentions in respect to taking forward RPA local government reform.
2.2	Notwithstanding, given the current economic climate and growing pressures on the public sector to do more with less, there is a real opportunity to have a conversation with central government departments regarding the need for and benefits of service integration at the local level.
2.3	As previously agreed by Committee in December 2010, Council officers have been in preliminary discussions with officials from the Department of Environment (including the Planning Service) and the Department for Social Development to explore the potential scope for Belfast to initiate an integrated area-based pilot. Such a pilot would seek to forge strengthened working relationships, build joint institutional delivery capacity and better integrate key place shaping functions (e.g. planning, regeneration, enforcement powers etc) at the local level. The Council has already a proven track record in successfully establishing integrated service delivery models in the areas of, for example, health and community safety. Work is underway to examine the potential business case for a Belfast pilot and the associated programme of work. Members will note that a further report detailing this work will be submitted for the consideration of the Committee in August 2011
2.4	With the new NI Executive now in place, Members may wish to consider seeking an early meeting with the Environment Minister, Alex Attwood and Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland to further explore the potential viability and scope of a Belfast based pilot.

3.0 Resource Implications

There are no financial or Human Resource implications contained within this report.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i) note the contents of this report; and
- ii) consider whether a meeting should be sought with both the Environment Minister and the Social Development Minister to discuss the potential viability and scope of a Belfast based pilot.

APPENDIX 1: Proposed functions to transfer to Councils

- **Planning**
 - local development plan functions
 - development, control and enforcement

- **Public realm function of local roads**
 - Pedestrian permits
 - Alley Gating
 - Permitting events on local roads
 - Off-street car parking and enforcement
 - On street car parking and enforcement

- **Regeneration**
 - urban regeneration
 - town and city centre regeneration
 - community development
 - area based regeneration (such as neighbourhood renewal)
 - support for voluntary and community sector
 - Living Over the Shops Initiative

- **Housing functions**
 - Some housing functions including repair and demolition notices.

- **Enhanced Local Economic Development functions**
- **Enhanced local tourism functions**
- **Emergency planning**
- **Community Planning**

