



Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of Public Administration Update
Date:	9 December 2011
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
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1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	Members will be aware that the NI Executive agreed a draft Programme for Government on 16 November 2011. Contained within this agreement was a firm commitment to proceed with local government reform based on the 11 council model, with elections to shadow councils in 2014, and the establishment of the new 11 councils in 2015. There is a commitment also to transfer key functions (e.g. planning and regeneration) to councils as part of the reform process. The Minister for the Environment has expressed a preference for a 15 council model and wishes the decision to proceed with 11 councils to be informed by the consultation process on the programme for government.
1.2	In terms of the 11 council model, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioners' final recommendations report published in June 2009 proposed that the new Belfast City Council would increase its population base from 277,000 to 320,000 (approximately). The new Belfast boundary would incorporate parts of the adjoining Castlereagh Borough, Lisburn City and a small part of North Down District Council area. The number of electoral wards, and therefore councillors, would increase from 51 to 60, with an average of 40 electoral wards for the other 10 new council areas.
1.3	It is understood that the proposed changes to the Belfast City Council boundary had been one of the previous areas of disagreement within the NI Executive and had impacted upon the postponement of the RPA being implemented by 2011.
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	<u>Key milestones</u>
2.1.1	Whilst further detail is still to emerge on the implementation of the local government reform (Review of Public Administration as it's known), it is understood that the key high-level milestones include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) By 2012/13 – put in place the necessary enabling legislation (e.g. Local Government Reorganisation Act and the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act) to enable the reform programme to happen; ii) By 2012/13 – establish the necessary programme structure to manage the change iii) By 2013/14 – establishment of suitable arrangements for the election of Shadow Councils in 2014 and the delivery of the implementation programme; and iv) By 2014/2015 – establishment of the 11 new councils, and suitable arrangements for the transfer of powers from central government to local government.
2.1.2	Members will appreciate both the scale of the challenge of preparing for the Review of Public Administration (RPA), and the opportunity which this presents in terms of the planned transfer of key place-shaping functions such as planning and regeneration back to the Council which will further enhance our ability to make a real and lasting difference in stimulating the local economy and improving the quality of people's lives across the city.
2.1.3	Whilst the Council will be less effected by the convergence issues which will be experienced by the other merging councils, we now need to restore our focus on planning for reform and, in

	particular, the transfer and integration of new functions. The Council has well developed systems already in place (e.g. effective planning, financial and HR management frameworks) which will assts in this planning process.
2.1.4	Work is underway to scope the key strands of work linked to the RPA to inform the preparation of the draft implementation (transition) and resource plan for moving forward. Members input into this process will be crucial and it is suggested that anny emerging plans will be an integral part of the Committees' future work programme.
2.2	Governance
2.2.1	It is understood from discussions with senior officials within the DoE that it would be the intention of the NI Executive to bring forward ' Statutory Transition Committees', representing those clusters of councils which areto merge together. The Statutory Transition Committees will oversee the reform programme at the local level and make the necessary preparations for the establishment of Shadow Councils in 2014 and Councils in 2015.
2.2.2	Members will note that in establishing the previous RPA governance and delivery structures, the Environment Minister at the time, Minister Sammy Wilson, agreed that the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee be designated as the 'Belfast voluntary Transition Committee' and that this committee would schedule an additional meeting a month to deal with RPA and transformation related matters. In addition, the Council had established a voluntary political forum with Lisburn/Castlereagh to identify and examine important transition related issues. Given the postponement of the RPA this forum had been suspended.
2.2.3	As the DoE will circulate, in due course, detailed guidance in respect of the role, remit and composition of any Statuitory transition Committee, including the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee, it will be important that the Council engages and discusses this with the DoE in advance.
2.3	Boundary Changes – Engagement with Lisburn and Castlereagh
2.3.1	The Council will need to give consideration to how it would wish to engage with Lisburn and Castlereagh in preparing for any proposed boundary changes and planning/managing any associated transition matters (e.g. ensuring service harmonistiaon, transfer of assets and liabilities, mitigating potential financial risks, minimising the impact on rates etc).
2.4	Transfer of Functions
2.4.1	As previously agreed by the Committee, discussions are ongoing with the DSD, DoE and DoE Planning Service regarding the potential for the Council to support the delivery and integration of key functions such as planning and regeneration at a local level in advance of any formal transfer to councils in 2015. This will put place the necessary foundations, relationships and capacity to underpin the future transfer of functions. Through this process the Council can better plan for and help minimise the potential impact on the rate. A further report will be submitted for the future consideration of the Committee.
2.5	Community Planning
2.5.1	Members are aware, a key aspect of local government reform will be the introduction of community planning powers for Councils together with a "power of well-being". At the Committee's last meeting it received an update on the progress of the community planning pilot in Belfast, currently funded by the BIG Lottery until end of February 2012 and the work of the Council's cross party working group on community planning to develop a "Belfast model" of community planning in preparation for the new duty.

2.5.2	The cross party working group on community planning have noted the importance of continuing this work given the intention set out in the programme for government and the economic strategy which states that “ <i>councils will lead a community planning process and will work with a range of agencies and interests to develop a shared vision for promoting the well-being of their area</i> ”.
2.5.3	The working group are considering ways to ensure that the learning and momentum generated by the pilot, particularly in the areas of community engagement and cross-sectoral working can be maintained and built upon, in order that Belfast’s emerging approach can inform future guidance and that the Council can move quickly to take full advantage of this opportunity to improve service delivery and outcomes for local people
2.5.4	Officers will explore realigning resources within estimated budgets to determine whether the level of support to this project can be maintained into 2012/13 and work through ways to ensure sustainability of the Big Lottery pilot with the cross party working group.
2.6	<i>Funding the Reform Programme</i>
2.6.1	Whilst the funding for local government reform remains a key issue which needs clarification, there is no doubt that there will be growing pressure from the NI Executive and DoE for local government to contribute towards funding those elements of the reform programme which will directly result in potential efficiency savings for councils. How such costs are identified, planned and budgeted for on a potential ‘invest to save’ basis will be crucial. A report on the potential resource implications for the Council attached to any reform and transformation programme will be submitted for the future consideration of the Committee. This will be set within the context of the Council’s medium-term financial plan and efficiency programme.

3.0 Resource Implications

There will clearly be financial and Human Resources implications for the Council in preparing for RPA, however, the scope and scale of these remain somewhat uncertain in the absence of further detail from the NI Executive and clarification on potential funding options.

Council officers are currently looking at the key strands of work which may be required and any associated resource implications.

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i. note the indicative milestones for local government reform as set out within the report;
- ii. note that work is underway to scope out the key strands of work required around RPA and any associated resource implications;
- iii. agree that the Council engage with the DoE in regards to the establishment of Statutory Transition Committees and any associated guidance; and
- iv. note the ongoing work of the cross-party community planning working group to ensure the sustainability of the BIG Lottery Community Planning pilot and to develop a ‘Belfast Community Planning model’