

**Report to:** Strategic Policy and Resources Committee  
**Subject:** Review of the Local Government Staff Commission  
**Date:** 19 October 2012  
**Reporting Officer:** Peter McNaney, Chief Executive. Ext. 6001  
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## **1.0 Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of a draft response to the Department of the Environment's review of the Local Government Staff Commission.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 The Department of the Environment is seeking views on the continuing need for the Local Government Staff Commission, which was established in 1972 and given a range of statutory responsibilities under the Local Government Act (NI) 1972. The Staff Commission is an Executive Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and its remit includes general oversight of matters connected with the recruitment, training and terms and conditions of employment of council officers.

2.2 The Commission's statutory duties have been static for many years while in contrast the political landscape and policy context in which the Commission operates has changed significantly. Policy priorities are articulated by the Programme for Government, one of which is the reform of local government.

2.3 The review also includes the Local Government Training Group (LGTG) established in 1993 to help discharge one of the statutory responsibilities of the Staff Commission, assisting councils to identify and address training and development needs from an overarching and sector wide perspective.

2.4 The consultation questionnaire examines the benefits that councils have derived from the Commission over the years; the validity of the Commission's current remit and how well it has met councils' needs; the sustainability of the Commission in the future; and value for money.

## **3.0 Key Issues**

3.1 The full response is set out at Appendix one, but in summary it is proposed the Council responds with these key points;

- Since the establishment of the Staff Commission, councils have matured as corporate public bodies, directly and legally responsible for their own actions, delivering services and internal functions including HR and training. It is expected that capacity to do this will certainly increase post RPA and there will be less need for the Commission's oversight of these matters.
- The amount of advice sought by Belfast City Council from the Commission over the years has diminished as internal HR capacity has grown.

Employment legislation has evolved, ensuring that all council's have in place and follow best practice recruitment and employment policy and procedures. In addition, the Equality Commission set up in 1998 now acts as a watchdog in these matters.

- The Council has benefitted from Staff Commission initiatives and the LGTG's training programme and select list of training providers over the years and its current aims and objectives are generally in line with council needs. Belfast City Council however believes that delivery of some of the strategic issues around capacity building for the sector, i.e. leadership development at senior level, has not been progressed as a priority. The Training Group open course provision offers good value for money, often derived from economies of scale achieved through procurement for the sector. Five hundred and fifty-two council officers have attended open courses (with subsidised daily training rates) in the last 5 years and the Training Group also contributed £57,826 for BCC officers to participate in programmes such as Federal Exchange Institute, the Frontline Development Programme etc.
- Some councils may consider the Commission and Training Group value for money because contributions are based on the net rateable value of the district councils. Because this formula is used it is unlikely that Belfast could ever recoup the full benefit of its sizeable contribution each year; (£212,176 was deducted in 2012/13.) The net rateable value of Belfast has no direct correlation to the council's demand for service provision from the Staff Commission or the Training Group and for this reason an alternative charging mechanism should be explored.
- The Commission has advanced the equality and diversity agenda across the sector and it promotes good practice, learning and collaboration.
- Adherence to the Commission's codes of practice can act as a safeguard against accusations of unfairness and malpractice in relation to appointments and employee relations procedure and practice.
- The Commission will have an important role to play in preparation for the HR aspects of local government reform, in the transition and then in embedding and consolidating the change. It will need to continue delivery of its statutory remit with existing clients, assist councils to build capacity for change in general, support the Local Government Reform Joint Forum and advise on the implementation of its agreements etc.
- During the transition it will need to assist with the establishment of new councils, provide independent administration and advice to recruitment panels for senior posts, ensuring the consistent application of transfer procedures for the appointment of staff to new structures and ensure equality of opportunity throughout the process etc.
- Beyond reform it will be required to assist in consolidating new councils and provide advice and assistance on staffing issues, ensuring consistent application of the Joint Forum agreements, etc.
- To enable the Commission to adapt and be responsive to the needs of the new councils in the longer term and add real value, its statutory remit may need to be revised in the context of the new and extended role of Councils

and their increased capacity. The need for the Commission's advisory and overseeing role should diminish after the new councils have become established and any long term sustainability must depend upon its ability to drive and facilitate strategic change at sector level, to build the capacity of the sector to deliver this organisational improvement and encourage collaboration and efficiencies across the sector.

- A review of the future role of the Local Government Staff Commission should also consider the roles of other bodies (such as the Public Services Commission).

#### **4.0 Resource Implications**

##### 4.1 Financial

Concerns around the formula for calculating annual council contributions are set out above.

##### 4.2 Human Resources

There are no Human Resource implications in this report.

#### **5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

5.1 There are no equality and good relations implications in this report.

#### **6.0 Recommendation**

6.1 Members are asked to agree this response to the DOE's consultation questionnaire regarding the review of the Local Government Staff Commission.

Documents attached

Appendix 1 – Belfast City Council's consultation response to the DOE's review of the Local Government Staff Commission

