

UUP response to Recommendations of effective and efficient operating models for local government service delivery in 2011.

The Ulster Unionist Party is disappointed at the limited proposals to devolve responsibility to the new enlarged councils and the limited opportunities for efficiency savings that will arise. The local government aspect of the Reform of Public Administration must not result in an additional burden on ratepayers. It remains our view that local government in Northern Ireland should have powers at least equivalent to local government in other devolved regions of the United Kingdom.

That said, it would be a wasted opportunity if during the RPA process we were not to examine how we can improve the local government structures and systems. Improving the quality of service provided for citizens and gaining better value for money must remain the key objectives along with increasing local accountability. A clear business case must be made to justify the proposed expenditure. Transformation opportunities within the new council arrangement must be fully examined so that service delivery improvement options and associated cost are fully considered.

Guidance and positive financial incentives could encourage local government collaboration to set up compatible systems which will bring long term savings and improvements to service delivery.

We are however aware that some significant publically funded bodies have opted out of the centralised bureaucratic HR Direct because of their concerns.

Compatible systems could also enable councils to voluntarily collaborate in wider niche opportunities for mutual benefit such as:

- Local partnerships to further develop Tourism brands that have been established by the sub-regional tourism bodies such as the Causeway Coast and Glens.
- Regional arrangements to replace group committee e.g. Building Control group committees, yet enable close working relations.

We agree that all transformation options within councils should be examined in detail and that new councils should be structured to minimise costs and improve the service to local ratepayers and, maximise future opportunities for councils to decide to work closely with other councils and outside bodies.

The Ulster Unionist Party agrees that there should be an enhanced, efficient Local Government Association with a role which mirrors those services that are provided by sister local government associations in GB such as COSLA and WLGA. The

existing Local Government Staff Commission functions which were planned to end in June 2009 could be transferred to a more accountable local government association as occurs in GB.