

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM – KEEPING YOU INFORMED



Issue 5

Minister Foster delivers the outcome of the Review of Local Government to the NI Assembly

In a statement to the Assembly on 31 March, the Environment Minister Arlene Foster announced further details of the new structure of local government, following the recent decision of the Executive, as reported on in our last issue.



Addressing the Assembly

The Minister briefed the Assembly on the Executive's vision for local government, the reduction in the number of councils and the functions which new councils will have to enable them to meet this vision.

In her statement the Minister said:

“Our vision for local government is one of a strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core. Central to the vision is the provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time. It reflects the strong desire that central and local government should work in partnership to deliver both the Programme for Government and the vision for local government.

Critical to this delivery will be an effective, statute-based community planning process that the new councils will lead and facilitate. Local government must be at the heart of the process, operating as a junction box of public services in the locality. Councils will also have a new statutory power of well being to assist them in delivering community planning. “

Structural Reforms

Addressing the structural reform of councils the Minister said:

“In order to deliver the agreed vision for local government the current 26 council areas will be rationalised to create 11 new council areas. The ability of councils to connect with and deliver for their communities is central to our vision for local government. This number of councils strikes a balance between reducing some of the diversity between the existing areas in terms of population characteristics and rating wealth, and promoting the ability of councils and their communities to identify and interact with each other.



New innovative and creative models of service delivery will be developed to promote modern and efficient practice, by grouping councils together for the delivery of significant services, such as planning, regeneration, building control and environmental health. These groups should provide the basis for developing coterminosity with other service providers.”

Functions and services to transfer to Local Government

The Minister outlined that following consideration of the responses to the Emerging Findings report that was published on 19 October 2007, the functions to transfer to local government would include:

- local development plan functions, development control and enforcement;
- the public realm aspects of local roads functions which include streetscaping; town and city centre environmental improvements; street lighting; off-street parking; permitting local events to be held on roads etc ;
- urban regeneration and community development delivery functions including those associated with physical development, area based regeneration (such as neighbourhood renewal) along with some community development programmes and support for the voluntary and community sectors;
- a range of housing functions; and
- a number associated with driving forward local economic development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

These decisions provide the firm foundations and framework for a once in a generation opportunity for us to create strong, effective local government that is at the heart of vibrant, safe and sustainable communities, delivering co-ordinated services for all our citizens.



Arrangements will also be developed so that local government will have formal input to the decisions in relation to a number of responsibilities that are remaining with central government. The Executive will also review the group of functions to be delivered by local government 12 months after the new Councils become operational and periodically thereafter.

The statement recognised the concerns of staff working in the local government sector, and those in the Northern Ireland Departments whose functions will transfer to local government. As the implementation of the reform and modernisation programmes are taken forward, every effort will be made to address these concerns. The Minister confirmed that consultation will take place with Trade Union and staff associations, and that the process will pay due regard to the Public Service Commission's guiding principles to ensure the smooth transfer of staff to the new organisations.

The full text of the [Minister's statement](#) can be found on the Assembly website.

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