

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING - 27 JUNE 2007**

**REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
MODERNISATION AND REFORM**

**AGENDA ITEM:** 6

**SUMMARY:** Providing members with an update on the review of the local government aspects of RPA commissioned by the Executive.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** For information.

**Background**

1. At the 24 May 2007 meeting of the Executive, recognising that Government needs to consider the strategic direction of the Review of Public Administration in its entirety, the Executive agreed that the decisions of the previous administration in relation to local government needed to be considered in this wider context and that I would bring proposals to the Executive for a process to consider the number of councils and functions which the Executive believed would be required in the context of Devolved Government and wider decisions on the RPA implementation programme.
2. A paper setting out detailed proposals for a review process to consider the number of councils and functions in the context of Devolved Government and wider Executive decisions on the RPA implementation programme is currently being crafted, which is still subject to consideration by ministerial colleagues and the Environment Committee, to be tabled at the Executive meeting on 5 July 2007 with a view to reaching consensus on the review process, which includes the draft Terms of Reference attached at Annex A.

**Review Process**

3. It is proposed that the review will consider what local government is expected to deliver in the context of a fully-functioning devolved Assembly and Executive, and in the context of the strategic direction of the RPA, to consider the number of councils and functions that the Executive believes would be required.

4. The draft Terms of Reference have been kept as simple as possible, and they are set firmly in the context of the Executive's views on the RPA implementation programme and its strategic direction. You will note that it is proposed that the review be overseen by a sub-committee of the Executive, reporting to the Executive as a whole. It is proposed that the DOE Minister chairs the sub-group, and that it should include the DRD, DSD, and DHPSSPS Ministers, given their interest in significant transferring functions. It is proposed that the DFP Minister should join the group given the significant financial implications of what is being considered. Of significant importance will be the need to liaise closely with other Departments where there are linkages between sectors in terms of developing co-terminosity and the community planning process. It is proposed to convene a meeting of the sub-committee as soon as possible after the Executive agrees to its formation.
5. The review will report to the Executive by the autumn. July and August will be spent in desk research, analysis and bilateral discussions with Ministers and others, with a view to bringing an emerging findings paper to the Executive in September. September and October will be spent in intensive engagement with key stakeholders, including the Environment Committee, to refine the findings. We do not propose to engage in public consultation. Our starting point for this review will be the consultation which the RPA team engaged in as part of the earlier process. The Executive sub-committee will draw heavily on the outcome of that consultation in developing its thinking. That would pave the way for the sub-committee to present its final report to the Executive in November, with a view to the Executive announcing its decisions to the Assembly and the public in December.
6. The proposed review will have three strands. The first strand will focus on developing our vision for local government. The second will focus on the numbers of councils and the third will concentrate on the functions to transfer to local government. The review will also consider the decisions of the previous administration to develop a council-led community planning process and the complementary power of well-being.

7. The detailed out workings of the three strands will be for DOE officials to develop in conjunction with departmental colleagues and other interested parties. However, the significant amount of work already taken forward by the Strategic Leadership Board which will be of great value in informing and carrying out the review. In particular, consultants had been commissioned back to work with my Department in partnership with the local government sector and other key stakeholders to develop and articulate an agreed shared vision for what Northern Ireland's new local government should be. It is still the Department's intention to have the consultants coordinate and facilitate a process of consultation and stakeholder engagement to develop the vision. Also, the work programme on modernising local government will be driven forward in parallel with the work to review the RPA structural and functional decisions.

## **REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASPECTS OF THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The review of local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration will consider what local government is expected to deliver in the context of a fully-functioning devolved Assembly and Executive, and in the context of the strategic direction of the Review of Public Administration, will consider the number of councils and functions that the Executive believes would be required.

In considering the number of councils, the review will consider the three options on which views were sought in the March 2005 Further Consultation on the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland.

In considering the functions that the Executive believe should be delivered by local government, the review will consider the decisions on local government functions set out in the previous administration's Final Announcements on the Review of Public Administration of 22 November 2005 and 21 March 2006, and will take account financial and efficiency considerations. The review may also consider options on which views were sought in the March 2005 Further Consultation on the Review of Public Administration that Ministerial colleagues may wish to be considered.

The review will be led by a sub-committee of the Executive Committee chaired by the Minister of the Environment, and will report to the Executive by autumn 2007.