

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING – 15 AUGUST 2007**

**VISION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

**AGENDA ITEM:** 4

**SUMMARY:** Providing members with an update on the planned approach and progress to date towards the development of a shared vision for local government in Northern Ireland.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** For information.

**Background**

1. At its meeting on 5 July the Executive approved detailed proposals for the agreed review of the local government aspects of the RPA along with the Terms of Reference (governance arrangements, timeline and key milestones).
2. The review is being taken forward in three strands. The first strand is developing a shared vision for local government - what we expect local government to deliver in the context of a fully-functioning devolved Assembly and Executive and the agreed strategic direction of RPA reform. The purpose of this paper is to detail the planned approach and progress update on strand one of the review within the overall review timetable.

**Planned Approach and Progress**

3. PwC consultants are working with the Department to support the development of the shared vision and, in particular, to facilitate and manage the stakeholder engagement. This consultancy assignment was commissioned back in January 2007 by the then Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) however the project did not proceed as planned due to the anticipated change in administration. In reviewing progress in implementing the RPA local government decisions and developing the review process the Executive agreed that developing a shared vision should

be an integral part of the review and therefore the consultancy input will now be used to support this work.

4. Attached at Annex A is the Project Initiation Document (PID) which has been agreed by the Vision Project Steering Group, made up of departmental officials and representatives from the NI Local Government Association (NILGA) and SLB, setting out the project scope, definition, objectives and management arrangements.
5. The approach to this work is two-fold; desk-based research and stakeholder engagement and the expected output is a shared vision for local government which will elaborate the role of local government balanced against that of central government. It is intended the vision will be developed in partnership and consensus encapsulating the range of stakeholder perspectives in a high-level framework for achievement of the vision, with particular reference to the political context, relationship between central and local government, role of elected members/democratic accountability, potential of community planning, potential of shared services, the ongoing modernisation programme and progress on other elements of the RPA.
6. The desk-based research to review and establish the characteristics of local government in Northern Ireland in the context of a fully-functioning devolved Assembly and Executive taking account of the RPA consultation and research and elsewhere, including the Republic of Ireland, England and Wales was completed at the end of July by PwC. The results provide comparisons between the comparator jurisdictions and Northern Ireland on a range of issues and demonstrate, as far as possible, the effectiveness and significance of local government in other jurisdictions. The research has also been used to inform the development of a topic guide for the stakeholder interviews and focus groups.
7. The stakeholder interviews and focus groups began in early August 2007 and there has been a very positive engagement by key stakeholders in the process thus far. We also intend hosting two stakeholder events. The first event, due to take place on 12 September 2007 in the Ramada Hotel, Belfast, will

communicate, test and augment both the initial findings of the desk research and any interviews that have been undertaken thus far. This event is intended to inform all stakeholders of the context within which the future shape of local government will be set and to contribute to the debate at an early stage. It will also help us in building consensus on key issues amongst the main stakeholders in this review.

8. The second event will be held on 16 October 2007 in the Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown. The aim of this event will be to confirm the vision that has emerged from the research and add to the evidence-based interviews already conducted. This event will also provide the opportunity to bring all three strands of the review together by sharing the emerging findings, agreed by you and presented to the Executive at their meeting on 27 September 2007, in respect of the numbers and functions to facilitate a discussion on these issues in the context of the proposed vision.
9. PwC will then present a final report on the visioning exercise to the Project Steering Group in late October. This will be used to inform the review recommendations with a view to bringing a final review recommendations report to the Executive at the end of November to allow the Executive to announce its decisions to the Assembly and the public in December 2007.