

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING – 5 OCTOBER 2007

REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT RPA DECISIONS – PROGRESS REPORT

AGENDA ITEM: 4

SUMMARY: Providing members with an update on progress of the three strand review of RPA decisions relating to local government.

ACTION REQUIRED: For information.

Background

1. The Executive Sub committee on Local Government Reform met on three occasions throughout August and September 2007 to consider and discuss progress in each of the three strands of the Review; developing a shared vision for local government, number of councils and, functions to transfer to local government.

Strand One – Developing a Shared Vision

2. Desk research to review and establish the characteristics of local government in Northern Ireland and examine models elsewhere including the Republic of Ireland, England and Wales was completed in July 2007.
3. Subsequently, stakeholder interviews and focus groups were conducted during August and September 2007 and culminated in a conference on 12 September 2007, at which findings were tested with a wider stakeholder audience representative of all sectors.

Strand Two – The Number of Councils

4. The Executive Sub Committee has reviewed the research and analysis taken into account by the previous administration in making the original RPA decision on the optimal number of councils. It has examined the range of factors considered and the relative weight applied to each of those factors.

5. Deliberations on council numbers are continuing. Ministers are considering the factors that influenced the decision on council numbers and the weight that they wish to give to these.

Strand Three – Functions to Transfer to Local Government

6. The third strand of the review is revisiting RPA decisions in relation to the transfer of functions to local government from Departments and public bodies. Ministers have been discussing and considering options for transferring functions, assessing the financial and efficiency considerations of proposals, as well as their potential impact on a council-led community planning process.

Next Steps

7. The progress of each of the three strands of the Review is incorporated in a draft Emerging Findings Report, which will be discussed by the full Executive Committee at the next available opportunity and thereafter published on the Department's website and circulated to all the stakeholders who have been engaged in the Visioning strand of the review so that views from stakeholders and the public can be considered.