

REGIONAL TRANSITION CO-ORDINATING GROUP UPDATE

Agenda Item: 4

Summary: The Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) held its second meeting on 15th December 2008. This paper provides a summary of the issues discussed and agreed at the meeting.

Action Required: To note.

BACKGROUND

1. Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) members will recall that:-
 - the key role of the RTCG is to translate policy into operational practice across the 11 new council areas;
 - RTCG, therefore, provides the essential interface between the strategic political level (SLB and the three Policy Development Panels), the local policy level (the Transition Committees) and their operational vehicles (the Transition Management Teams); and
 - the Group is chaired by Paul Simpson (DOE) with Peter McNaney (Chief Executive of Belfast City Council) as Vice Chair and its membership comprises senior officers from local government and the Departments transferring the more major functions to local government.

2. At the inaugural meeting of the Group, on 25th November 2008, members stressed the importance of ensuring that there is clarity on the detail of the functions that are to transfer from central to local government. In these circumstances, transfer of function position papers were commissioned from each of the relevant Departments and these were considered at the Group's second meeting on 15th December 2008.

DETAIL

3. RTCG members considered that the Departmental position papers helped to flesh out the high level list of functions included in the announcement in the Assembly, on 31st March 2008, about the outcome of the Executive's review of the local government decisions of the previous administration. The information included in each paper included: the policy and legislative context with which the function is currently delivered; details of the function; associated responsibilities being retained by central government; estimates of resources likely to transfer; and issues which Departments wish to discuss further with local government.

4. RTCG members agreed, however, that in a number of areas there is a need for early engagement between central and local government to develop further clarity on the detail of the functions transferring and to consider arrangements for integrating these with functions that are already the responsibility of local government. This is particularly the case with the local roads public realm responsibilities which are to transfer from the Department for Regional Development. RTCG considers that Policy Development Panel (PDP) C, which has responsibility for the transfer of functions, would be the appropriate forum for engagement between local and central government on these issues. The Chair of the RTCG, therefore, wrote to the Chair of PDP C (Alderman Arnold Hatch), on 19th December 2008, requesting that the Panel establish a Transfer Of Functions Working Group, comprising officers drawn from local government and the transferring function Departments, to consider the detail. As part of this strand it was also proposed that a specific "task and finish" group be established to facilitate detailed discussions with Roads Service in relation to the local roads public realm functions.

5. The task and finish group has been established and has met on two occasions. The overall Transfer of Functions Working Group is due to

meet shortly. PDP C will consider the deliberations of these groups and will report the outcome to the SLB.

6. The RTCG also considers that a local government Human Resources Co-ordination Group (comprising officers from the LGSC, transferor bodies, NIJC and the Trade Unions) should be established, under its direction, to advise on regional human resource and staff transfer implementation issues. In order to ensure that there is clarity on the remit of this proposed HR group, the Chair of the RTCG has suggested, in his correspondence with Alderman Hatch, that PDP C present a paper to SLB setting out the HR implementation issues which must be addressed operationally and that these issues be remitted to the HR Co-ordination Group of RTCG to be taken forward. Members of Panel C are considering these proposals and will be presenting a paper, outlining their views, for SLB's consideration.
7. The next meeting of the RTCG will be held on 12th February 2009. The key agenda items will include papers on the Local Government Reform Implementation Framework and the Communications Strategy.
8. Arrangements are also being made for the RTCG to meet PricewaterhouseCoopers to discuss the Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery consultancy assignment in general and arrangements for taking forward Phase 2, which includes an assessment of operating models for the provision of corporate support services (e.g. Human Resources, Finance, ICT, Estate Management), in particular.

RTCG SECRETARIAT