

REGIONAL TRANSITION CO-ORDINATING GROUP UPDATE

Agenda Item: 4

Summary: This paper provides a summary of the key issues discussed and agreed at the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group meeting held on 12th February 2009.

Action Required: To note.

BACKGROUND

1. The Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) was established in November 2008 with the key remit of translating policy into operational practice across the eleven new Council areas. It, therefore, provides the essential interface between the strategic political level (the Strategic Leadership Board and its three Policy Development Panels), the local policy level (the Transition Committees) and their operational vehicles (the Transition Management Teams).
2. 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 four Departments transferring the more major functions to local government.
3. This Group held its third meeting on 12th February 2009. This paper provides a summary of the key issues discussed and agreed at the meeting.

DETAIL

PricewaterhouseCoopers Presentation

4. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) gave a presentation to the Group on the Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery

assignment. The presentation encompassed details of the PwC team devoted to the assignment, the approach to both phases of work, timing requirements and the key delivery requirements.

5. RTCG members agreed that the cost implications of service delivery options will require careful consideration and confirmed that they were content with PwC's approach to the assignment in general and to that for phase 2, for which RTCG forms the Steering Group, in particular.

Community Planning

6. The Group was informed that a community planning paper was being prepared - for discussion at the Policy Development Panel A meeting on 19th February - setting out the key issues which need to be addressed to support the process including resources and the need for a task and finish group to take it forward.

7. The Group's views were that:-

- it would important to recognise that there will be a need to provide additional resources to support the process;
- there will also be a need to engage with other statutory bodies which are implementing initiatives that impact on community planning; and
- the emphasis should be on basing community planning on the 11 council model particularly as place shaping would help embed the new council areas.

Communications Strategy

8. The Group considered an earlier draft of the communications strategy paper which is to be presented to the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) meeting on 6th March. The Group noted that:-

- paper provided a framework and general principles that are to guide all communications issued by the Joint Secretariat on the Local Government Reform Programme;
 - Joint DOE/NILGA communications, which would primarily focus on the key deliberations of SLB and RTCG, was one of three strands of the overall communications strategy;
 - DOE and NILGA had both produced individual communications strategy strands which reflected the differing audience requirements of each organisation;
 - RTCG will be the Communications Steering Group and would be supported by a LG Reform Communications Group; and
 - the next step would be the development of a Communications Plan which would be presented for RTCG's consideration.
9. RTCG members were concerned with the proposal that membership of the LG Reform Communications Group include "one or two representatives of each of the 11 council clusters". They agreed that, at this stage, it would be important to ensure that each of the existing 26 councils be represented on the Group. It was considered that this would evolve over time to allow its membership to be more closely aligned to the 11 council structure. The communications paper presented to SLB has been amended accordingly.

Transferring Functions Working Group Update

10. It was noted that Policy Development Panel C (PDP C) had accepted RTCG's suggestion that a Transferring Functions Working Group be established with the remit of providing clarity on the detail of the functions transferring from central government and considering arrangements for integrating these functions within local government. The Working Group, which is chaired by Peter McNaney with Ian Maye as Vice Chair, will be supported by a series of Technical Sub Groups

and is to present its proposals to PDP C in late March and then SLB in April 2009.

11. The Transfer of Functions position paper, considered at the last RTCG meeting, is to be taken into account in the Group's deliberations.

HR Implementation Issues

12. Eddie Curtis provided a very helpful update for RTCG members on the recommendations of the HR Working Group report which had been accepted by PDP C and SLB. He also confirmed that the Group was also working on a paper, for presentation to PDP C and SLB, setting out the key implementation issues which need to be addressed operationally.
13. RTCG members stressed the importance of continuing to ensure that all the Public Service Commission Guiding Principles, which had been agreed by the Executive, are adhered to. RTCG also considered that it would help reassure staff if the Minister reinforced this commitment in a statement at a suitable opportunity.

Further Guidance for Transition Committees

14. RTCG considered a paper which provided advice, for amalgamating councils and other transferor bodies, on the importance of engaging at an early stage with Transition Committees on key decisions relating to planned programmes and projects which have the potential to impact significantly on the new councils.
15. Subject to the inclusion of a number of amendments, RTCG agreed that the paper should issue.

Other issues

16. The Group considered a number of other matters including the paper, presented to the last SLB meeting, on the Local Government Reform Implementation Framework. The Group also noted that all the voluntary Transition Committees had met, or were due to meet, by the end of February.

RECOMMENDATION

17. It is recommended that SLB notes the information provided in this update.

RTCG Joint Secretariat.