

**REGIONAL TRANSITION CO-ORDINATING GROUP /
JOINT FORUM UPDATE**

Agenda Item: 6a

Summary: This paper provides a summary of the issues discussed at the last meeting of the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group along with an update on the work of the LG Reform Joint Forum.

Action Required: To note for information.

REGIONAL TRANSITION CO-ORDINATING GROUP

1. The Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) met on 25th March 2010. The formal minutes of the meeting have not yet been agreed but the attached Key Outcomes paper provides a summary of the key issues discussed.
2. Key points to note are set out below.

Voluntary Regional Transition Committee

3. At the meeting members were updated on proposals to replace RTCG with a voluntary Regional Transition Committee (vRTC) and a voluntary Regional Transition Management Team (vRTMT). In these circumstances, it was noted that this was likely to be the last meeting of RTCG and it agreed that it would be helpful to use it as a stock take of the work of the sub groups for which RTCG is responsible. It was, however, accepted that it would be for the new vRTC to decide on whether or not these groups would continue.

Finance and Estates Implementation Group

4. Members noted the Finance and Estates Implementation Group Progress Report (paper RTCG 09/2010) which provided an update on the work that has already been taken forward by the group and that which is to be addressed.
5. The paper, which is available on the DOE and NILGA websites along with all other RTCG papers, embraces the following key work areas:-
 - striking the 2011/2012 district rates;
 - operational guidance;
 - date guidance;
 - model transfer scheme;
 - transfer of funding; and
 - estates and accommodation issues.

Transfer of Functions Working Group

6. Members considered a paper (RTCG 10/2010) which provided an update on the Strategic Leadership Board's deliberations on the Transfer of Function's Working Group Update report and action being taken on the four key recommendations which had been accepted.
7. Discussion concentrated on the recommendation in paragraph 21 of the report - *about a Task and Finish joint officer teams being established and charged with developing working examples (i.e. local, sub regional and regional) of how transferring functions would be integrated*. Members agreed that that there was sufficient expertise within the current Task and Finish Technical Sub Groups to enable this recommendation to be taken forwarded.

Other

8. Members also considered a paper (RTCG 12/2010) which set out proposals for implementing the agreed approach to the development of a customer strategy. It was agreed that this paper should be considered by the vRTC and, in the interim, DOE and NILGA officers would explain and promote the approach advocated in the paper to the Transition Committees.
9. Members were also updated on the:-
 - deliberations at the SLB meeting on 25th February 2010, including the local government responses to achieving efficiencies and collaboration and the funding of the reform programme;
 - work of the Local Government Joint Forum (see below); and
 - Local Government Reform Monthly Progress Reports.

LG REFORM JOINT FORUM

10. The Forum met again on 24th March and continues to make good progress. The key issues and current state of play are as follows:

Severance Scheme

11. A Scheme has been agreed by the Forum but successful operation pivots on the availability of adequate funding. The Forum has written to SLB and this is the subject of Item 7 on the Agenda.

System for filling Senior posts

12. The Forum has weighed the legal advice referred to it by SLB, the opinions of interested parties and legal advice obtained separately from the QC and has reached a consensus on an approach and

related job information. A local government representative accepted the general principles but reserved his position on the equality aspect. He is not convinced what he feels is a current gender and religious imbalance at Chief Executive level will be redressed.

13. Given its statutory role in recruitment the Local Government Staffing Commission will be asked to comment on the proposed approach at its next meeting before the matter goes back to SLB. This will probably be the 23rd June meeting of SLB.

Staff Transfer Scheme

14. Work on this Scheme should be completed in time for consideration at the next Forum meeting in April.

Vacancy Controls

15. After initial smooth running following introduction in September 2009 the Vacancy Control System is encountering difficulties and tensions affecting the operational effectiveness of councils and impacting on staff. The Trade Unions have expressed concern about the damaging effects of anxiety and falling morale. Current uncertainty about RPA implementation is reported to be significantly contributing to the present difficulties. The Forum is considering how best to respond.
16. As there is a need to strike a careful balance between the need to protect staff from risk of redundancy and maintaining business continuity it was decided to activate the System in Phases. Phase 1 has been activated and applies to largely senior posts `at risk` of compulsory redundancy including the Chief Executive, Director, Head of Service tiers.
17. The controls mean the vacancies can only be filled temporarily on a fixed term, secondment or acting up basis by staff designated as `at risk`. This means `at risk` staff who wish to move to another post

either move sideways or up from a lower tier into any vacancy arising. It also means capacity to fill posts is limited and that vacancies are displaced and reappear usually lower down the organisational structure.

18. Capacity is reportedly now very low. Compounding factors include the reluctance of staff to move into temporary posts which are perceived as insecure and the extended process required to fill vacancies under the controls. Because of the displacement effect and the circumstances while the Forum has identified `at risk` staff to be included in a Phase 2 it is taking a cautious approach to activation.

RECOMMENDATION

19. It is recommended that members note the information provided in this update.

Joint Secretariat

April 2010