

**UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM EXECUTIVE SUB
COMMITTEE MEETING**

Agenda Item: 6

Summary: This paper provides members with an update on the Local Government Reform Executive Sub Committee meeting held on 15th September 2009.

Action: Presented for the information of members.

BACKGROUND

1. The local government RPA proposals of the previous Direct Rule administration were reviewed by a Sub Committee of Executive Ministers. The recommendations of that Sub Committee were agreed at the Executive meeting on 13th March 2008 and were then announced in the Assembly on 31st March. This announcement defined the future shape of local government including the number of new councils and the transfer of functions from central government.
2. Earlier this year, it was agreed that it would be helpful to re-establish the Sub Committee to consider a number of local government reform implementation issues which cut across Departments. The Local Government Reform (LGR) Sub Committee is chaired by Minister Poots and its membership comprises the Ministers with responsibility for DFP (Sammy Wilson), DSD (Margaret Ritchie), DSD (Conor Murphy) and DHSSPS (Michael McGimpsey).

DETAIL

3. The LGR Sub Committee met on 15th September 2009 and considered a range of reform issues. Following the meeting, Minister Poots wrote to the President of NILGA, Councillor Mathews, outlining the key points agreed. A copy of the Minister's letter dated 29th September 2009,

which was copied to Strategic Leadership Board members, is attached as an Annex to this paper. Members will wish to note that the Sub Committee:-

- agreed a series of marginal changes to the DRD and DSD elements of the package of functions which are to transfer from central to local government;
 - committed their Departments to the engagement requested by local government in relation to community planning;
 - requested early sight of the report on the Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery Phase 2 which will support the bid to DFP for funding of the reform implementation programme;
 - carefully considered the issue of the transfer arrangements for civil servants whose functions will transfer from central to local government; and
 - agreed that the temporary transfer model, which applied to DHSSPS staff which transferred to the new Health and Social Care bodies, would be the starting position for the central government representatives in discussions and negotiations at the Local Government Reform Joint Forum.
4. The next meeting of the LGR Executive Sub Committee has been arranged for 16th November 2009. An update on this meeting will be provided at the next Strategic Leadership Board meeting on 18th November 2009.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Local Government Policy Division

ANNEX

**From the office of the
Minister of the Environment**



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Your reference:

Our reference:

29th September 2009

Dear John

You will be aware that the Local Government Reform Executive Sub Committee, which I chair, met on Tuesday 15th September 2009. I will update you on our discussions at the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) meeting on 16th October. In the interim, I thought it would be helpful to write to you and provide a brief résumé of the key points the Sub Committee agreed.

We discussed the recommendations, outlined in Arnold Hatch's letter and enclosures dated 30th April 2009, about the marginal changes to the package of functions announced for transfer, from central to local government, in the Assembly on 31st March 2008. You will recall that the key areas involved were the public realm aspects of local roads functions (Department for Regional Development), "Living Over the Shop" grant scheme (Department for Social Development), and Travellers' Transit Sites (also Department for Social Development). I can confirm that:-

- Minister Murphy has accepted local government's proposal that the following public realm functions should transfer (pedestrian permits, alley gating, permitting local events on roads, off street car parking and on street parking enforcement). This is subject to his Department retaining policy ownership of the on street parking enforcement function;
- Minister Murphy has also confirmed that he is content for his Department to retain the following functions which local government advocated should not transfer (maintenance of amenity areas, salting of footways, grass cutting/weed spraying, gully emptying and street lighting);
- Minister Ritchie has accepted the local government proposal that the "Living Over the Shop" grant scheme should transfer; and

- Minister Ritchie has not accepted the sector's recommendation that Travellers' Transit Sites function should remain with the NIHE.

I know that Minister Ritchie has carefully considered the views of local government on the Travellers' Transit Sites issue but is not convinced by the argument that the transfer of responsibility for this function would adversely impact on the traveller community. Indeed, the new councils will have a responsibility equal to that of the NIHE to protect the rights of minority groups. The Executive Sub Committee supports Minister Ritchie's position.

The Sub Committee also received an update on current thinking on community planning and the programme of activities involved in supporting its introduction in 2011. I emphasised the strong views, expressed by SLB members, about the need for Departments to commit to engaging with local government as the programme progresses. I can confirm that Executive Sub Committee members do appreciate the importance of community planning and expressed their full support to the required engagement between central and local government as implementation of the programme is taken forward. I will also write to all other Ministerial colleagues seeking their commitment to this engagement process.

I updated the Sub Committee on the work that is being taken forward, through the assessment of options for local government service delivery project, to support a bid to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for funding of our implementation programme. I explained that it was likely to be mid October of this year before PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) had completed the economic appraisal of delivery options and SLB had the opportunity to consider the key findings. The Sub Committee members are all well aware of the budgets constraints that the Executive is working within and the many competing priorities for resources. It is clear that DFP will require a very clear assessment of the costs and benefits of implementation along with details of how these pressures might be funded. We agreed, therefore, that it would be helpful to let Ministers have sight of the PwC report as soon as possible.

The Sub Committee also discussed the issue of transfer arrangements for civil servants whose functions will transfer to local government in 2011. We reviewed the arguments for and against the two main options i.e. permanent transfer and temporary transfer arrangements based on those applied in the case of the Department of Health Social Service and Public Safety (DHSSPS) staff whose functions transferred to the new Health and Social Care bodies on 1st April 2009. We noted that the intention is for similar arrangements as those applied in the Health sector to be adopted by the new Education and Skills Authority – due to be established in January 2010.

Our view is that temporary transfer arrangements would have a number of advantages, particularly in terms of flexibility in managing the workforce and thus is consistent with the Executive's commitment to make every effort to avoid redundancy costs and it also facilitates business continuity. It was decided that the temporary transfer model that applied to DHSSPS staff will, therefore, be the starting position for the central

government representatives in discussions and negotiations at the Local Government Reform Joint Forum.

I do hope you find this update helpful. I am copying this letter to SLB members for information.

Yours sincerely

EDWIN POOTS MLA
Minister of the Environment