

Emerging Findings – Review of Local Government aspects of the RPA

Key issues

Interim findings of the review of local government aspects of the review of RPA

Changes to some of the services transferred

Ongoing consultation regarding the number of councils

1. Introduction

A Review of the local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration was agreed at an Executive Committee meeting on 5 July 2007 and has been ongoing since. The review has three strands – developing a shared vision for local government, consideration of the number of councils and consideration of functions transferring to local government. The review is also considering decisions to develop a council-led community planning process and the complementary power of well-being.

An electronic version of this document can be found at http://www.doeni.gov.uk/emerging_findings_paper_for_executive_meeting_on_18_october_2007_-_final_version.pdf

2. Purpose of the paper

The paper provides an account of the interim position of the Executive Sub-Committee. In terms of the vision for local government, the paper notes that evidence shows that local government elsewhere is going through a period of considerable reform. Other key trends include an increasing focus on strengthening local government and a greater emphasis on co-ordinating

services to meet local needs. The paper goes on to note that stakeholder engagement provided a consensus that the review was a real opportunity to transform local government in Northern Ireland. Further issues, identified as influential in the review process include, amongst others:-

- the vision for local government should be the major influence in determining the functions and numbers of councils;
- the vision for local government should be closely linked to a vision for Northern Ireland public service as a whole
- the interests of the citizen should be at the centre of all decisions relating to the new arrangements
- Community Planning is seen as a critical tool in delivering these arrangements.

The paper states that “the desire to create councils of sufficient scale to optimise service delivery needs to be balanced with the clearly expressed wish of stakeholders of enhancing the role for the citizen in service planning and delivery. Embracing more fully the principle of subsidiary and local delivery of services needs to be balanced with the cost implications of such service delivery models”

The paper also notes that the Executive Committee is aware that the experience of local government elsewhere indicates that reform programmes typically have a lifespan of 10 years or more Annex A of the guide provides a list of contacts and further sources of information.

3. Council numbers

The Executive Committee has reviewed the considerable amount of information taken into account by the previous administration and appreciates the complexity involved in the decision making process. The Committee accepts the need for and benefit of reducing some of the existing diversity between councils as well as creating councils of a scale that promotes the ability of communities to identify and interact with their local council.

There is ongoing consultation regarding the numbers of councils and the Executive Sub-Committee is still keen to accept views on what factors should be key determinants.

4. Transfer of functions

In considering what functions to transfer the RPA placed emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity implying powers are delegated to the most local level consistent with effectiveness and efficiency. It was also of the view that councils needed a critical mass of services if they were to fulfil the leadership role in the community planning process.

The key functions proposed for transfer are:-

DoE – Planning (local Development Plan functions), Development Control, Enforcement; Built Heritage
DCAL – Armagh County Museum; Leisure and Recreational facilities; Local Sports; NI Museums Council; Local Arts; Local Events
DARD – Rural Development
DRD – Local Roads Public Realm; Donaghadee Harbour
DSD – Urban Regeneration and Community Development
DETI – Local Tourism; Local Economic Development
OFMDFM – consideration is being given to Civil Contingencies and Good Relations Strategies and Plans

5. Community Planning and Council Governance

The Executive Committee remains committed to the decisions made concerning councils leading the community planning process and the power of well-being. The Paper also states that the Committee remains committed to a system of council governance would be developed and placed on statute.

6. Modernisation Programme

The Minister agreed that work on modernising local government should continue alongside the work on the review of RPA. The paper notes that any modernisation programme is likely to require substantial resources to pay for up-front costs with efficiency saving coming over the longer term. To make this a reality a Challenge Fund is envisaged, administered by the DoE, to incentivise local councils to modernise services.

7. Conclusion

The paper concludes by noting that “Achieving strong, effective and efficient local government will be a long term process that will require sustained effort over a considerable number of years ...The proposals set out in this paper mark the beginning of a process of reform and modernisation, not the end.” It goes on to comment that the Executive will have to develop stronger relations with local government to ensure continuous development.

8. Comment

APSE welcomes the fact that a review of the decisions of the RPA has been undertaken. It is APSE’s view that the outcome of this review will ensure ownership of the RPA by the current administration. This is a significant time of change and opportunity for transformation of public services and it is appropriate that those currently in power are able to promote the benefits of RPA from a position of involvement and ownership in all stages of the process.

“The proposals set out in this paper mark the beginning of a process of reform and modernisation, not the end” states the paper. APSE would expect a

schedule to be published which identified the expected dates of transfer as well as dates for review of how well the transfer of services has been implemented (focusing on the outcomes for service users). It should also include dates indicating when consideration of which further services should be transferred from departments to local councils and an indication of how far after this any identified services should be transferred. Such a schedule should be published at an early stage in the process to reflect the commitment the current administration has to ensuring an ongoing programme of transfer rather than this being a one off exercise without the opportunity to build on progress made to date. In order for there to be successful hand over of services and effective functioning post transfer, the capacity of local councils must be increased both in terms of particular service related skills and in terms of relations with the Departments and encouraging citizens to engage with services they may not have had the chance to in the past.

The stated commitment of the Executive Sub-Committee to the decisions made regarding the community planning role means that there must be an inherent commitment to the provision of services at a local level. Community planning only works when there is real involvement by councils, other public sector bodies and stakeholders and most importantly local residents. They must be able to interact with the providers of local services and feel they have an influence over those services if it is to be beneficial. The level of effectiveness is based upon the extent of services delivered at the local level. Community planning for only a limited number of services could end up as no more than a focus group on remotely delivered services. There is common acknowledgement that this is a vital stage in the development of public services in Northern Ireland. It is a fundamental requirement that the community planning, leadership and service provision roles of local government must come together to ensure continuously improving services are provided and that citizens are engaged with those delivering of services used.

The costs of the various options for new councils and the costs of models for service delivery are noted in the paper as factors which have been considered when looking at the future number of councils and which services to transfer. These are indeed costs to be borne in mind when establishing the way forward for local government. However they are not the only costs. There are the costs associated with a of lack of access for local people, a lack of accountability for councillors, confusion about which body or level of government delivers which service and of the indifference of ordinary people to the democratic process. The cost to the public purse is significant when planning service delivery but it should not be used as a reason for avoiding change. Public services exist to improve the quality of life of ordinary people and this is the overriding factor. The issue noted in the paper, relating to the interests of the citizen as a factor influential in the review is especially relevant.

It is disappointing to note that a number of the functions identified for transfer have been deleted. The national debate around the way forward for local government has focused on the holistic approach it can provide, the place

shaping role and the leadership responsibility it has amongst other public sector service providers. Local councils are moving to a neighbourhood approach which concentrates more on the places that people live and less on the way the council is organised – a user focused approach. Local government has experience of interacting with local people and addressing local problems. The Departments should take the strategic role, helping to direct and influence the direction local government takes. When the distinction between the two roles is lost, it is easy for service users to lose faith in the public sector and feel a lack of influence.

The place shaping role is one which is acquiring a higher profile. Over recent years relations between local public service providers have developed, there has been an expansion in joint working and local partners have entered into more formal arrangements. There is an expectation that the place shaping role of local councils will be the next logical step. Such a development would be effective as a means of combining the influence of relevant bodies but only where the local council has appropriate responsibility and powers to be a leader and shaper. At present local councils in Northern Ireland have only limited functions and those originally proposed for transfer have not fully materialised. The opportunity to transform local government into a local place shaper must not be missed – it needs enhanced responsibilities to ensure it plays the role of an elected local body reflecting the aims and priorities of local people in the provision of a full range of public services.

Local public services are continually under pressure to modernise to ensure effective delivery, be as efficient as possible, take advantage of developments in technology and meet rising customer expectations. The modernisation programme must be built into local government service provision whatever the state of progress with the RPA. There are many examples of new ideas which have led to improved services in local councils and this best practice should be exploited with the help of the envisaged Challenge Fund to ensure continuous improvement. It is APSEs experience that local government learns best from within its own ranks and one of the elements built into such a Fund should be that those projects that receive help are promoted widely both within and without local government.

Details of the kind of services provided in 4 unitary authorities are noted in Appendix A to give an example of how services can be arranged at the local level.

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Principal Advisor

Appendix A – Examples of provision of services in 4 unitary authorities

Falkirk Council – 150,000 population, 112 square miles

Roads

Roads related services within Falkirk Council are provided by the Roads and Development and Engineering Design units of Development Services and by Roads Services in Estates Management, Corporate and Commercial Services.

Roads and Development Unit manage the road network, maintain the list of public roads and have responsibilities for new roads and streetworks and flood prevention. Construction Support team provide specialist advice and guidance on construction related matters.

Engineering Design Unit provides road, bridge, street lighting and geotechnical design services.

Roads Services, Estates Management, Corporate and Commercial Services are responsible for maintenance and construction of the Falkirk Council area road network, vergeside fencing, vergeside grass cutting and traffic control.

Libraries

Falkirk Council Library Service has seven static libraries and two [mobile libraries](#). There is also a service for [homebound](#) users who cannot easily reach a static or mobile library.

Anyone who lives, works or studies in the Falkirk area may join the library. Books, music, DVDs and other items are available for loan. Every library also provides [free high speed internet access](#). The catalogue is available online and there are a number of other interactive services such as renewing or reserving a title or joining the library.

Youth and Sports Services

If you are into sport and leisure activities for excellence, social meetings or simply keeping fit, we have something to offer everyone. With a large choice of [sports centres](#) throughout the Falkirk area there are classes, clubs and activities for all age groups and abilities.

Bring the children to parent and toddler swimming, use the crèche or soft play or join in with the mini gyms where children learn agility, balance and co-ordination. Keeping fit is no longer a chore and you can easily book courts to play badminton, squash, five a sides and more, or why not come along to one of the many aerobic classes on offer. There are also opportunities for children to improve their sports skills by attending [sports coaching](#) sessions and a programme of coach education and development.

For the more serious athlete, there is the [Centre of Excellence at Grangemouth Athletics Stadium](#). Customers with a disability are also encouraged to use our facilities. Bo'ness Centre hosts the Forth Valley Sports Association for People with a Disability and Grangemouth sports complex the Dolphin club.

City and County of Swansea – 227,000 population, 146 square miles

Highways

The Highways group is responsible for ensuring all highway maintenance and managerial issues are dealt with effectively. The group covers a wide range of services and is based at a Clydach Depot where as a combined service unit; we are able to deal with most issues and complaints directly.

There are three front desks operating at Clydach:

- Highways Faults (Potholes, Dangers, etc.)
- Street Lighting / Street Lighting (Lights out, Damaged, Design, etc.)
- Highway Maintenance (Licensing, Works coordination, planned maintenance..)

And there are currently seven teams that make up Highways:-

1. Highways Administration - Front Desk Management, Systems and operations, etc.
2. [Street Lighting](#) - Street Lights out, Inspect & Repair or replace Damaged Lights, Design issues and developments etc.
3. Highways Maintenance - Potholes and re-surfacing, dangers, minor repairs, programme maintenance, etc.
4. Development and Control Team - Highways Developments, Planning coordination, Street Naming & House Numbering, etc.
5. Construction - All construction works and traffic signs maintenance, etc.
6. Works Co-ordination - Highway Licensing, Works Co-ordination, Abandoned Vehicles etc.
7. Finance & Purchasing - Highways procurements, orders, invoices etc.

Youth Services

The Youth Service work with young people aged 11 - 25. This is done in a number of ways, through traditional club-based youth work to detached youth work, which takes place on the streets. The Youth Service is responsible for the training of all youth workers and this is achieved through the Professional Youth work Network (PYN).

The Delivery of Youth Work Across the City and County of Swansea

- Work with 11 to 25 year-olds, with priority for 13 to 19 year-olds,
- Youth Work Curriculum: to ensure that opportunities are Participative; Educative; Empowering and Expressive,
- Methods of delivery include: Youth Clubs; Young People's Groups (YPG's); Detached and Outreach Youth Work; Residential Work; Holiday Programmes; International Youth Exchanges;
- Recognition of Achievement in a variety of ways, including: Open College Network Credits (OCN's); Duke of Edinburgh's Awards; Sports Leader Awards; Youth Achievement Awards and Getting Connected Programme etc

Libraries

There's more to libraries than books - visit your local library for DVDs, magazines, local information and free internet access. Swansea's local libraries provide a huge variety of services, from photocopying to providing the books you request. Free internet access is also available in the library with the added bonus of a really fast connection.

East Lothian Council – 90,000 population, 263 square miles

Libraries

Prestige for Prestonpans

Prestonpans Library, which re-opened earlier this year following a £780,000 refurbishment and extension project, has won a prestigious national library building award.

The Public Libraries Group (PLG) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council of the Republic of Ireland) launched the Public Library Building Awards 1995.

The awards are recognised throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland as indicators of professional library development and as benchmarks for public library facilities, reflecting the major changes in library provision in the 21st century. The categories of the individual awards focus on key importance in building design, practice, management and use and Prestonpans Library won the 'Architecture Meets Practicality' award.

Transport

East Lothian Council's Transportation Division is responsible for the management and maintenance of 912km of public road network, 321 bridges and culverts, and some 16000 street lighting columns. The Division also provides winter maintenance cover, transport services, road safety improvements, road development control and design services.

We aim to provide the people of East Lothian, and it's visitors, with a high quality and value for money service in the maintenance and development of the Road network.

Road Network Management - Reporting Faults , Planned Roadworks, Permits Road signs & carriageway markings, Road Safety, Bridges, Lighting and School Crossing Guides

Road Services - Winter maintenance routes

Transport Services - Transport to school

Activities for children and young people

Youth Clubs and groups - What's on for children and young people in East Lothian.

Young Scot - Scotland's national youth information service.

Dialogue Youth - A partnership designed to give young people a real and effective say in all services that affect them.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award - A challenging programme of activities for 14-25 year olds.

John Muir Award - An exciting and fun approach to understanding our environment. Discover, learn and enjoy whilst experiencing outdoor activities.

Lothian Association of Youth Clubs - LAYC is a voluntary sector youth and children's work organisation covering the City of Edinburgh, East, Mid and West Lothian areas.

Outreach youth work and community safety - Working with young people in non-traditional settings.

Conway County Borough Council – 112,000 population, 702 square miles

Transport and roads

Abandoned vehicles - We remove abandoned vehicles, vehicles that are clearly not being used, are untaxed and may be a danger to the public. If the vehicle is still being used it is not abandoned.

Parking - We operate car parks, maintain and enforce controlled parking zones, issue and control parking permits and issue Penalty Charge Notices, as part of our parking services.

Public transport - Information about bus and train travel, including timetables, concessionary fares information, and details of Conwy Community Transport (mobility) initiatives.

Road and street maintenance - Information about road maintenance, salting and gritting and street lighting, plus contact details of local highway offices.

Road and traffic safety - Road safety information for the County Borough, including traffic schemes to improve safety, road safety education and campaigns targeting drivers.

Street cleansing - The Council is responsible for sweeping 1800km of roads throughout the County Borough, but how often your street is cleaned will depend on a number of things.

Libraries

Libraries have always been a great source of information and support for education and learning. And there is much more to the services we offer than just borrowing books. Browse these pages to see what help we can give you with studying, learning and research.

Archive services – the Council provides an Archives Service

Conwy library services for children and young people - Visit the new Children and Young Peoples' Library website to discover the full range of services for young people and to access a great selection of Homework Help links selected by library staff.

Learn at your library - Learning doesn't always have to lead to a qualification - you can do it just for your own enjoyment. It's guaranteed to boost your confidence, and you never know, that casual interest could get you that dream job!

Library information services - Get help with school and college projects! Your library is your local information centre where you can get free access to information on a wide variety of subjects from books, leaflets or the Internet.

On-line information services in libraries - Access quality online information services such as Oxford Reference Online that you would normally have to pay for.

Use computers in every Conwy Library - Access the internet via a fast connection for free and use software to write letters, do school projects and edit photographs.