

SUMMARY OF THE DECISIONS ON FUTURE SHAPE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT 31 MARCH 2008

Environment Minister Arlene Foster spelt out on 31 March details of the future shape of local government. Summary of the decisions announced:

- **Community Planning:** The new councils will lead and facilitate a statute-based community planning process: they will act in partnership with private, statutory, voluntary and community sector agencies to respond to the needs and aspirations of local communities, and to allow people to have a say in which their area is developed. Legislative proposals will be brought forward to ensure there is a clear statutory requirement placed on other public bodies (including policing, health and education bodies) to participate and support the community planning process and a clear duty placed on councils to engage with local communities in producing a community plan.
- **Power of well being:** The new councils will have a new statutory power of well being to assist them in delivering community planning. This new power will allow them to take any action, not already the responsibility of another agency, linked with the community plan that will improve the well being of the local community or local area.
- **Governance arrangements:** A range of governance models with appropriate checks and balances will be developed, to ensure effective and inclusive local democracy, to protect the rights of minorities, to prevent discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity. These will include arrangements to allocate Council Chairs, Deputy Chairs, positions on Council committees and to facilitate cross community decision making. The new governance arrangements will be embodied in statute.
- **Council numbers:** The current 26 council areas will be rationalised to create 11 new council areas. This strikes a balance between reducing some of the diversity between the existing areas in terms of population characteristics and rating wealth and promoting the ability of councils and their communities to identify and interact with each other.
- **Number of councillors:** Belfast will retain an upper limit of around 60 councillors and the remaining councils will have an upper limit of around 40 councillors. The determination of the precise number of councillors will be informed by the report from the independent Local Government Boundaries Commissioner on the number of wards within each new district.
- **Councillors severance scheme:** a councillors severance scheme will be introduced to recognise the contribution of long serving councillors who opt not to stand for re-election.
- **Dual mandate:** legislative proposals will be brought forward to end the “dual mandate” of councillors who are also MPs and/or MLAs.
- **Coterminosity:** New innovative and creative models of service delivery will be developed to promote modern and efficient practice, by grouping councils together for the delivery of significant services, such as planning, regeneration, building control and environmental health. These will work in tandem with other service providers, such as health or education.
- **Performance management and modernisation challenge fund:** Development in partnership with central government, of performance management systems and of proposals for a modernisation challenge fund that will support innovative and efficient practice.
- **Shared services:** Development of regional shared service arrangements to deliver common back office services such as ICT, accounting services, payroll and procurement across all 11 new councils.

TRANSFER TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

- **Current expenditure** of functions transferring: £116 million: 25% increase in local government budget.
- **Number of staff** transferring: 1070: almost 12% increase in local government staff.

Functions transferring:

- **Planning:** local development plan functions and development control and enforcement.
- **Roads:** local public realm responsibilities: Roads Service work in relation to:
 - streetscaping;
 - town and city centre environmental improvements;
 - grass cutting and weed spraying;
 - gully emptying;
 - street lighting;
 - off-street parking;
 - pedestrian permits;
 - maintenance of amenity areas;
 - alley-gating (traffic regulation orders facilitating alley-gating to avoid antisocial behaviour);
 - permitting local events to be held on roads; and
 - salting of footways.
- **Urban regeneration and community development:**
 - functions associated with physical development (such as environmental improvement schemes, comprehensive development and urban development grant)
 - area based regeneration (such as neighbourhood renewal)
 - some community development programmes for the voluntary and community sectors.
- **Housing:**
 - registration of houses in multiple occupation
 - housing unfitness responsibilities, including repair and demolition notices
 - energy conservation at local level
 - responsibility for travellers' transit sites.
- **Economic development** (transfer from Invest NI):
 - Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows
 - Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire)
 - Social Entrepreneurship
 - Investing for Women
 - Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprises initiatives.
- **Local Tourism:**
 - small scale tourism accommodation development
 - local tourism marketing
 - local tourism product development
 - Visitor Servicing
 - Providing business support including business start up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes; and
 - providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues.
- Delivery of the EU Rural Development Programme;
- Authority to Spot List to enable Councils to add a building to the statutory list on a temporary basis, subject to ratification by the DOE;
- Authority to draw up local lists of buildings that are of architectural and/or historic interest;
- Armagh County Museum;
- local water recreational facilities;
- local sports;

- functions of the NI Museum Council;
- local arts;
- local festivals; and
- Donaghadee Harbour
- Arrangements will also be developed whereby local government will have a formal input to the decisions in relation to a number of responsibilities that are remaining with central government.
- **Timetable:** the aim is to implement the agreed structural reform package by 2011.
- **Next steps:**
 - appointment of an independent **Local Government Boundaries Commissioner** to draw up the proposed boundaries for the 11 new local government districts. Introduction of a Local Government (Boundaries) Bill to provide for this appointment.
 - Establishment of **detailed implementation structures**.
 - **Integration of the modernisation work** into the implementation arrangements.
 - Development of a robust **cost/benefit model** for this programme.
 - **Capacity building** programme for elected members and local government officers.

Link to the DOE page from which the press releases, statement to the Assembly and maps of the new councils can be accessed:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/minister_foster_announces_decisions_on_local_government_reform.htm

Press Release 13 March 2008:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/minister_fosters_press_release_review_outcome_-_press_release.pdf

Link to the Press Release, 31 March 2008:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/announcement_31_march_2008.pdf

Link to the map showing the 11 new council areas:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/council_numbers_-_map_11b.pdf

Link to the Minister's statement to the Assembly:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/minister_s_statement_to_the_assembly_-_31_march_2008.pdf