



MID AND EAST ANTRIM
VOLUNTARY TRANSITION COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 25th January, 2011 at 7 p.m. in the Council Chamber, The Town Hall, Carrickfergus Borough Council

In the Chair: Ald. W. Ashe (Carrickfergus Borough Council)

Present: Ballymena Borough Council

Ald. J. Alexander
Cr. J. Currie
Ald. P. J. McAvoy
Cr. T. Nicholl

Carrickfergus Borough Council

Cr. L. McClurg

Larne Borough Council

Cr. R. Craig

In Attendance:

Mrs. A. Donaghy,	}
Town Clerk and Chief Executive;	}
Mrs. J. Fulton,	} Ballymena
Transition Co-ordination Manager;	} Borough Council.
Mr. A. Cardwell,	} Carrickfergus
Town Clerk and Chief Executive.	} Borough Council.
Mrs. G. McGahey,	} Larne Borough
Town Clerk and Chief Executive	} Council.

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>MINUTE</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>APOLOGIES</u>	
	Apologies were received from Ald. D. Hilditch, Crs. M. Mills, G. Mulvenna and A. Wilson.	
	It was agreed that a Get Well card should be sent to Cr. Mills who had been in hospital.	AC
2.	<u>MINUTES OF THE VOLUNTARY TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26th OCTOBER, 2010</u>	
	<u>Tabled and previously circulated:</u> Minutes of Voluntary Transition Committee Meeting held on 26 th October, 2010.	
	On the proposal of Ald. J. Alexander, seconded by Cr. R. Craig it was:	
	<u>Agreed:</u> That the Minutes of the Voluntary Transition Committee Meeting held on 26 th October, 2010, be approved and adopted, subject to an amendment to the venue as the meeting had been held at the Braid rather than Ardeevin.	AD
3.	<u>MATTERS ARISING</u>	
(i)	Citizen Engagement/Participatory Budgeting	
	Mrs McGahey provided an update on the study visit to England that had taken place during November 2010. A group from Larne Borough Council comprised of 2 councillors, 2 officers and the Transition Coordination Manager had visited Barnet, Birmingham and Coventry Councils to learn from their experiences. The introduction of citizen engagement and participatory budgeting will be a medium/long term project for Larne Borough Council.	
	<u>Noted</u>	
4.	<u>ROLE OF VOLUNTARY TRANSITION COMMITTEE</u>	
(i)	Report from the Planning and Capacity Building Workshop	
	<u>Tabled and previously circulated:</u> Report from the Planning and Capacity Building Workshop held on the 26th October 2010 circulated for information.	

Mrs Donaghy referred members to the summary report prepared by Tribal Helm following the Workshop held in the Braid on the 26th October. This report captured the key points from the round table discussions including achievements, key learning points and factors that brought success. During discussions, the Voluntary Transition Committee had decided to review their role within the context of collaborative working and the future policy direction as set out by the Minister at the event. The outcomes from the discussions were as follows:

- a) Each council to report back on the VTC's achievements to date and outline a proposed way forward for the VTC pending clarification of the Executive's intentions regarding the future of the RPA process.
- b) To support the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) programme being developed by and for the 26 councils.
- c) Whilst there was overall support for commencement of collaborative working, each individual Council would be responsible for defining precisely their means, method and level of engagement in the various programmes for collaboration.
- d) Subject to agreement and approval by each constituent Council it is anticipated that a further meeting of the VTC would take place within the next 3 months.

Mrs Donaghy provided an update on the position and plans of other clusters. To date, two areas had taken the decision to continue meeting with a refocused terms of reference, namely the Causeway cluster and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.

The Community Planning recommendations as discussed and agreed at the Workshop were also summarised.

Recommendation 1

The Transition Committee and each council should adopt the community planning concept. This would provide a sound framework within which to develop a strategic and operational approach to ensuring the provision of effective, efficient, quality services which reflect the needs and priorities of the local community with all their partners, including citizens themselves.

Recommendation 2

The Transition Committee and/or each Council should develop a capacity building programme for Members and Officers to ensure readiness for taking forward the governance and civic leadership requirements, challenges and opportunities of community planning in improving services and quality of life for all in partnership with others.

Recommendation 3

The evidence base should be assembled to confirm these needs and priorities within each council and by each council.

Recommendation 4

Each council should proceed with a Phase 2 programme of work to identify community planning needs and priorities.

Recommendation 5

Following completion of Phase 2, the Transition Committee and each Council should agree on the approach and governance framework to engaging the local community, citizens and other partners across all sectors in meeting the needs and priorities within a community planning approach. Thereafter, the actual planning and implementation of community planning should begin.

Subsequent discussions relating to the way forward for the voluntary Transition Committee highlighted the difficulties in making long term plans with continuing uncertainties regarding the RPA implementation timeframe. This was acknowledged by the chair, however, there was agreement by all present that members had found the team work and learning opportunities provided by the voluntary Transition Committee a very positive and beneficial experience.

Agreed: There was unanimous agreement that the recommendations in the Tribal Helm report be accepted by the VTC and taken back to the respective councils. Proposed by Cr. Nicholl, seconded by Cr. Currie.

**AC, AD,
GMcG**

(ii) Current Joint Committee Status

Mr Cardwell outlined the current status of the voluntary Transition Committee. The agreed remit for the committee was closely tied to RPA with the timeframe of May 2011 specified in the terms of reference as agreed by Councils prior to RPA. The Committee had delegated powers on matters relating to RPA and the only operational budget specified was that provided by the Department. He indicated that the three Chief Executives had discussed the potential for reframing the terms of reference to focus on improvement, collaboration and efficiency, all captured within the ICE programme.

Cr. P.J. McAvoy referred to the letter from the Minister regarding the VTC in October 2010. The chair explained that this letter suspended funding due to severe financial constraints within the Department of the Environment and the NI Executive's decision to delay the implementation of RPA, however voluntary Transition Committees were encouraged to continue working together to realise potential savings. At the workshop in the Braid, the Minister had also reinforced his commitment to the reform programme and indicated that he would revisit the role and responsibility Committees might

play in the reform programme when a new delivery timetable was determined.

The consensus of opinion by members was that it was important to look to the future and move on together. The work of the Committee should focus on collaboration delivering benefits for the citizens across the three areas.

Agreed: A revised terms of reference for the Voluntary Transition Committee would be developed focusing on collaboration. This would be discussed at the next meeting. Proposed by Cr. J. Alexander, seconded by Cr. J. Currie.

AC

Declaration of Interest: Mrs J Fulton left the room for discussions on item 5 which related to contractual arrangements for the post of Transition Coordination Manager.

5. **CONTRACTUAL & WORKING ARRANGMENTS OF TRANSITION MANAGER**

Members were appraised of the current contractual obligations and funding position in respect of the Transition Coordination Manager. As previously advised, the funding from the Department will cease on 31 March 2011 and the three councils have agreed to continue financing the post until 31 May 2011. Members agreed that this post was extremely valuable and indicated that further research would be required in relation to ascertaining the feasibility or otherwise of continuing to fund this post across the three Council on a collaborative basis. It was agreed that further advice would be sought by the Human Resources Department in Ballymena Borough Council from an employment law perspective and legal advice would be obtained.

AD

Agreed: Advice would be sought from Human Resources, Ballymena Borough Council.

6. **IMPROVEMENT, COLLABORATION AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME (ICE)**

Tabled and previously circulated for information: ICE Project Plan

Mrs. G. McGahey advised that the “Case for Change” had recently been issued. The consultation document had been sent to Mayors, Chief Executives, Trade Unions and Professional Officer Groups.

She highlighted that there had been some confusion regarding the purpose of the programme. ICE had been initiated to explore options to the Business Services Organisation (BSO) proposed by PWC under RPA. This proposal had been unanimously rejected by the sector and

NILGA had asked SOLACE to consider alternatives. The 'Case for Change' was a scoping document identifying opportunities to deliver savings that would be fully explored after the consultation through the development of full business cases for each agreed priority.

A governance paper would also be circulated with the consultation document. In the initial consultation issued in August 2010, the majority of councils opted for a 26 council governance model. The phase II consultation fleshed out the proposals in relation to the governance and resourcing of the proposed Regional Coordinating Group.

The closing date for the ICE consultation was the 8th March 2011. A final report would then be compiled for the NILGA Full Members Meeting on the 25th March 2011. The report would also be presented to the Minister on this date.

A number of joint engagement events on the proposals had been organised by NILGA/SOLACE on the 14,16, 22 & 24 February 2011. The events would run concurrently with the NILGA consultations on Local Government Reform. Members were encouraged to attend.

Noted.

7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM PROPOSALS

Mrs Donaghy drew member's attention to the Local Government Reform Proposals included in the report for information purposes. Following the policy consultation stage, the proposals would progress to a statutory basis. It was therefore important to fully consider the proposals and identify the key issues. Each council would be submitting a separate response, however there would be merit in sharing comments and consultation responses in due course.

The Finance Bill was also out for consultation with a closing date of the end of February 2011. Collaboration by the Finance Officers would be beneficial in considering the proposals.

Noted.

8. COLLABORATION

(i) Joint Biodiversity Officer

Tabled and previously circulated: Letter from NIEA regarding the joint application for a Biodiversity Officer.

Mrs McGahey provided an update on the application for a joint biodiversity officer. A second stage acceptance letter had been received from NIEA. The application had progressed to the final shortlist stage however confirmation of available budget for this grants programme was still awaited from DOE prior to issue of a final decision on funding.

Noted.

(ii) Expression of interest in planning pilot

Mrs Donaghy informed members that Ballymena Borough Council had submitted an expression of interest in running a planning pilot following the recent consultation from the Department on the Planning Bill. Ballymena Borough Council had indicated in their letter that they would raise the matter at this Committee and would be keen to include Carrickfergus & Larne Borough Councils in this pilot. She indicated that the Cluster would be in a positive position as the on-boarding process for Network NI had been completed and this would form the basis of the infrastructure of the e-pic planning system. If interested Carrickfergus and Larne were asked to indicate their willingness to join Ballymena in this collaborative project.

**AC,
GMeG**

Noted.

(iii) Alignment of procurement policies

Mr Cardwell suggested that the 3 councils would benefit from aligning their procurement policies to facilitate collaboration. At present each council has different threshold levels for quotations and tenders and this was acting as a barrier to joint procurement initiatives. The policies were designed to deliver best value and seek the most economically advantageous solution however compliance with policies and legislation is fundamental to this process.

Agreed.

9. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT OFFICE REPORT

Tabled and previously circulated: Programme Management Report.

Mrs Donaghy indicated that the Programme Management Office Monitoring Report covering the period from October to December 2010 was unchanged from the previous version. As previously agreed the report would be submitted to DOE to confirm that the voluntary Transition Committee was still active.

Agreed: The PMO Monitoring Return for the period October to December, 2010 was approved for submission to DOE. **AD**

10. FINANCE

(i) Update on the transition budget

Mrs Donaghy reported that the cluster was continuing to draw down the salary for the post of Transition Coordination Manager from DOE. The projected end of year financial position would be available at the next meeting. **AD**

Noted.

(ii) Loan Sanctions

Tabled and previously circulated: Report detailing Loan Sanctions in respect of Larne Borough Council.

Noted

11. MEDIA REQUESTS

No media requests had been received.

12. CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence had been received.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Progress report for Minister

The Chair indicated that at the workshop in Ballymena, during his introduction he had indicated that he would keep the Minister informed of progress. He therefore sought member's agreement to forward the Tribal Helm report to the Minister.

Agreed.

(ii) Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 22nd February 2011 at Larne Borough Council.

Cr. P. J. McAvoy indicated that due to other commitments he would be unable to attend and gave an advance apology.

The Meeting terminated at 7.50 p.m.

Alan Cardwell, Chief Executive of Carrickfergus B.C.	A.C.
Anne Donaghy, Chief Executive of Ballymena B.C.	A.D
Geraldine McGahey, Chief Executive of Larne B.C.	G. McG.
Jennifer Fulton, Transition Coordination Manager	J.F.