



## Capacity Building – Councillor training starts in preparation for transfer of planning functions

A training programme has now started to equip Northern Ireland's councillors with the knowledge and skills to effectively carry out planning functions.

The training events will help ensure that decision makers have the confidence, as well as the competence, to make prompt, sound planning decisions from day one. They are a result of ongoing significant efforts to ensure that councillors, council staff and planning staff receive the necessary training so that those with responsibility for delivering the new system have the capacity to make it the best it can be.

A series of training events are due to be rolled out until late January 2015 and sessions planned will cover an overview of Planning for councillors, development plans and working with the community, practical Planning, and propriety and outcomes.

The training will be facilitated and delivered by senior planning staff but will also include representatives who have experience of similar planning systems in other jurisdictions. The training will help prepare those attending to understand the new planning system, the processes involved in making planning decisions and the need to comply with ethical standards.

## NICS staff transfer scheme

A staff transfer scheme for civil servants is now in place. DFP has agreed the model scheme with Trade Unions and it will be used by DOE, DRD and DSD to enable staff to transfer from their current employer to their respective new council.

The employment contracts of these staff will be protected in accordance with current employment and equality legislation, such as the Transfer of Undertakings (TUPE) and the Acquired Rights Directive on which TUPE is based.

A separate staff transfer scheme is currently being prepared for Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff. The scheme will be similar to the transfer scheme agreed for local government staff.

## DOE consultations and Guidance

**Standing Orders Regulations and Model Standing Orders:** The consultation is now closed. The Standing Orders Regulations are expected to be scheduled for debate in the Assembly in October and to come into operation on 1 November 2014.

**Prescribed Offices and Employments Regulations:** The consultation is now closed. The Regulations will be laid in the Assembly by 30 September 2014.

**Executive Arrangements guidance:** The Department expects to issue this guidance in early October. This will support the operation of executive arrangements by outlining the relationship between the council and its executive in relation to the council's decision-making, and the role of overview and scrutiny committees in this process.

**Council's Constitution Framework:** The Department expects to issue a draft of the Framework for consultation in early October. A Council's Constitution will set out details of how the council will operate and take decisions.

**Transferred Functions Grant:** The Department expects to begin a targeted consultation on the Local Government (Transferred Functions Grant) Regulations in October. The Regulations will introduce the mechanism for transferring the budgets required to undertake the transferred functions from central to local government.

For more information on consultations, visit [www.doeni.gov.uk/local\\_government\\_consultations](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/local_government_consultations).

## New DOE guidance

The following three pieces of guidance have recently issued to councils:

- Guidance on financial arrangements for councils to cover costs of the Assembly Ombudsman for NI and the NI Commissioner of Complaints, in relation to the Local Government Ethical Standards Framework.
- Guidance on the impact of Transferring Functions and Transferred Functions Grant on the rate setting process and General Estimates of Rates Form.
- Guidance on dependants' carers allowance 2014.
- All guidance can be viewed on the DOE website at [www.doeni.gov.uk/2014-circulars](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/2014-circulars).

## Focus On...Mid Ulster economic development planning

Mid Ulster Council has become one of the first of the new local authorities to begin work on a new economic development plan for its district.

The Council views the economic development of the area as one of its top priorities and has embarked on an extensive consultation programme, initially targeting the 8,000 VAT registered businesses across the Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt areas in an on-line 'business needs survey'.

The survey results will help to inform a series of 10 sectoral business workshops, which will then be complemented by more than 20 in-depth business interviews with key stakeholders in government, the wider public, private and voluntary sectors.

Consultation is the first stage of the Council's work to develop the two-year Economic Development Plan (2015-2017).

It forms a vital part of the process to ensure the new plan reflects the needs of indigenous enterprises and is effective in driving the region's future prosperity and economic growth, as Presiding Councillor of the Council, Cáthal Mallaghan, explained:

*"A robust economic plan is fundamental to the region's long term prosperity and is a priority for Mid Ulster District Council. The Mid-Ulster area possesses a strong and resilient business base, renowned for its entrepreneurship and innovation and it is critical that our plan maximises all opportunities available to our indigenous business sector and does so in a way which creates the best platform to accelerate growth and competitive advantage."*

When the consultation is complete, the draft economic development plan will feed into the Council's community planning engagement exercise before being finalised for implementation from 1 April 2015.



### Have your say...

Pictured at the launch of the consultation process for the Mid Ulster District Council Economic Development Plan are Councillor Cáthal Mallaghan, Presiding Councillor of Mid Ulster District Council (centre), Councillor Frances Burton, Chair of Mid Ulster District Council's Development Committee (left) and Councillor Kate McEldowney, Vice-Chair of Mid Ulster District Council's Development Committee (right).

## Countdown

1 October = 6 months until the new councils take over on 1 April

### DOE PLANNING SECTION

#### Transfer of planning in Newry, Mourne and Down moves a step closer

On Monday 29 September, a joint venture between DOE and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council went live, marking the completion of a major step towards the formal transfer of local planning functions to the council on 1 April next year.

The path finding project involves moving experienced planning staff and the services they provide from DOE local planning offices in Marlborough House, Craigavon, and Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick, to council sites in Downpatrick and Newry. Here, they will be co-located with future council colleagues and serve the whole of Newry, Mourne and Down.

Under the new arrangement the planning service for Newry, Mourne and Down will be provided from the Downshire Civic Centre in Downpatrick, and Council Offices in Monaghan Row and Greenbank in Newry. The presence of planning at the Civic Centre will further enhance the public service hub being developed at Downshire, which already sees the council, Fire Service and Northern Ireland Housing Executive operate from there. In Newry, the public will have planners on their doorstep for the first time in many years and the ability to lodge planning applications locally instead of travelling to Craigavon.

An important aim of the project is to help understand how planning might best fit within and be delivered from a council structure and operating environment. The information and lessons learned from the project will be shared with the other councils which also need to be ready to assume their new planning responsibilities.

A Q&A on the project can be viewed at [www.planningni.gov.uk/planning-pathfinder-project-sept-2014.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/planning-pathfinder-project-sept-2014.pdf)



#### Newry, Mourne and Down move a step closer...

Pictured at the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Shadow Planning Committee, from left to right, are Liam Hannaway, Chief Executive of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Anthony McKay, DOE Area Planning Manager who has responsibility for running the joint project and Councillor Gareth Sharvin, Chair of Shadow Planning Committee.