



RTPI Northern Ireland

mediation of space · making of place

Northern Ireland Assembly
Environment Committee
Room 247
Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Date: 11 November 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Local Government Reorganisation Bill

The Institute is the largest professional body representing spatial planning and represents over 20,000 professional planners in the public and private sectors. The Institute has over 500 members in Northern Ireland, many of whom are actively involved in developments that cross a number of government departments and are therefore well placed to comment on this paper.

The operation of a planning system relies upon openness, transparency, public faith in the impartiality and fairness of the system, good evidence and timeliness. The RTPI NI commends the Department for its commitment to the reform process and in general supports the production of this Bill as the final piece of legislation in this process. RTPI NI supports the establishment of a code of conduct for councillors to be included within primary legislation and the introduction of a new ethical standards framework for local government.

Much of the Bill relates to the operational functions and arrangements of the newly formed councils, therefore RTPI NI will focus its response around the matters specific to planning, mainly Part 10: Community Planning.

Community Planning

Part 10 of the Bill introduces the legislative basis for community planning, a council-led process to provide a framework for councils to work in partnership with other public service providers in their district to plan and implement a shared community vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being and development of the area. This is to be achieved through the production of a community plan. The council must ensure that community involvement is at the heart of the production of the plan, its implementation and review.

The RTPI NI members involved in preparing this response are encouraged to observe a statutory link between community planning and landuse planning and also, significantly, that Northern Ireland is the first jurisdiction to support the link between these functions in legislation. It was felt that this was an important milestone in the development of the alignment between community and landuse planning.

In light of this the RTPI NI would wish to make the following comments;

- The wording of the Bill identifies the statutory link between the land use and community plan. How will the timing of these plans evolve? There is a preference for them to be developed in conjunction with each other.
- Will a definition be provided as to what is 'well-being'? The Bill refers to the improvement of social, economic and environmental well-being as long term objectives, further clarification as to what these well meaning phrases are is required.
- Community planning partners. Legislation in Scotland and Wales provides details of partner organisations. There is concern that by not providing service partner information in legislation both councils and partners will not be obliged to participate. This is particularly relevant in situations when potential planning partners are outside of the council remit. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of the details of a core of planning partners.
- It was proposed that there should be a more strategic approach to community engagement that considers the overlap between landuse and community planning. Councils should be provided with an engagement framework model that will see the merging of the two plans and the consultation that takes place around them to ensure that engagement is done in a meaningful way that is understood by and means something to the public.
- There was concern that the opportunity should be taken to break down the silo's that currently exist around the separate planning functions of planning, regeneration and community planning and that there should be a statutory link between these three important elements of planning, to create a more 'joined up' approach.

Planning at all stages of the process can be emotive affecting as it does the things that really matter to people, we trust you find these comments useful. Should you require any further clarification do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Williamson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Claire" and "Williamson" being capitalized and prominent.

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