



Key Outcomes from Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) 06.3.09

Minutes of Meetings

- Minutes from the previous SLB meeting on 23 January 09 were approved subject to the inclusion of some minor amendments. The revised minutes will be available soon on the Local Government section of the Department of the Environment (DOE) website and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) website.
- www.doeni.gov.uk
- www.nilga.org

Programme and Risk Management

- To ensure a managed and consistent approach, a programme management reporting system is being developed by DOE. Risk analysis will be taken forward as part of this new system.
- These will be developed through consultations with the Policy Development Panels (PDPs) and rolled out to the Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams.
- Training will be provided to Transition Management Teams as the new system is rolled out.

Area Plans

- Planning Service is continuing to work on the issue of progressing pilot development plans in advance of 2011 with the Transition Committees. Planning Service is happy to discuss with the NILGA/Planning Working Group what can be realistically achieved jointly with the resources available. Discussions will be informed by the PwC work on Service Delivery Models and by consultations on the shape of the Reform Programme.
- The issue was raised that some development plans are so old that they are causing major problems. It was suggested that this could be a factor that would influence which areas might be taken forward for the pilot area plans.
- It was also agreed that a large piece of work will need to be carried out to ensure that councils and officers have the capacity to carry out all of the work required of councils after planning reform.

Policy Development Panel (PDP A) - Governance, Central and Local Relations and Community Planning Update

Governance Arrangements for Transition Committees – PDP A Recommendations

- The level of representation from constituent councils on Statutory Transition Committees should be that agreed by the DOE for the Voluntary Transition Committees.
- The Panel has been unable to reach consensus on whether the level of representation from constituent councils should be equal or related to the size of respective councils.
- Councils should have the flexibility to use the D'Hondt, Saint Lague or Single Transferable Vote approaches for the determination of their representation.
- Discussion is ongoing in relation to determining a definitive version of D'Hondt that should be applied across those councils that select this approach. This matter will be subject to further consultation.
- The Panel indicated that achieving inclusivity across council groups was unlikely to be an issue as this only affected two council groupings (Lisburn / Castlereagh and Ballymena / Carrickfergus / Larne). A political agreement has been reached in these areas and it was recommended that if these local arrangements continue to be applied for representation on the Statutory Transition Committees, then inclusivity would be achieved.
- The governance arrangements proposed for the new councils post 2011 should apply to the Statutory Transition Committees, with some minor modifications.
- A dispute resolution process, using a facilitator / mediator, should be available to Statutory Transition Committees as a mechanism of last resort, at their own expense.

Policy Development Panel B (Service Delivery)

- PDP B has agreed five key deliverables:
 - a Customer Service Strategy
 - an Information Systems (IS) Strategy for Transition
 - a Shared Services Strategy
 - a Procurement Strategy
 - a Service Delivery and Performance Improvement Framework
- The main focus of the Panel, at present, is the development of a paper setting out policy proposals for the Service Delivery and Performance Improvement Framework.
- The Panel is anxious to ensure that key stakeholders have a full understanding of all the issues involved and is, therefore, organising a policy seminar. The paper will then be finalised and it is hoped that it will be presented to the next SLB meeting.
- The IS Strategy for Transition has been broadly agreed, but further work is required before it is passed to Transition Committees for implementation.

Policy Development Panel C (PDP C) - Structural Reform Issues

- A verbal report was provided by Panel C highlighting the progress made on the Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery consultancy assignment. It was noted that PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has already held over 35 meetings with key stakeholders and these meetings are ongoing.
- As part of this exercise, Panel C and other stakeholders had made it clear that the default position is that services should be delivered through the 11 councils and that this should be the starting point for the modelling of final options. It had, however, been recognised that there is a need for a regional element to service delivery.
- The transferring functions work is progressing well but local government urged the Minister to reconvene the Executive Sub-Committee on Local Government Reform to get political buy in to the process. The Minister agreed to write to his Executive colleagues within the next week.
- Co-terminosity was discussed and a desire was expressed that as much work as possible should be done on this issue to ensure that it is factored into PwC's modelling of options.
- The Northern Ireland Executive has accepted the Public Service Commission (PSC) guiding principles and there was strong agreement that these principles should be adhered to. It was however agreed that there is a need to ensure good understanding of the process and that considerations detailed in the principles should be worked through on a case-by-case basis. Learning points from other sectors should assist with this.
- PDP C will be presenting a paper on Human resources (HR) implementation issues to the next SLB meeting on 10 April 2009.

Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group Update (RTCG)

- It was agreed that the appropriate Policy Development Panels should be given the opportunity to feed into further guidance for Transition Committees.
- Agreement that every effort should be made to ensure that all guidance produced should be disseminated widely to all members of councils.
- Local government members stressed the importance of the key Departments transferring functions nominating senior officers to join the Transition Management Teams. It was reported that the Department for Social Development (DSD) had already identified its nominees, Planning Service was in the process of doing so, and that the Department for regional Development (DRD) would do so soon.

Communications Paper

- Agreement that RTCG will act as the Communications Steering Group, reporting to SLB. SLB has the overall strategic control of the communications agenda.
- A key element of the strategy is the establishment of a Local Government Reform Communications Group. It was agreed that the initial membership of this Group should comprise representatives of each of the 26 councils but that it would be important to ensure that this quickly evolves to align with the 11 council arrangements.

- It was also agreed that further work would be carried out to identify the appropriate forum to sign off key communications messages. This will form part of the Communications Plan that will be brought to SLB.

Legislative Position Paper

- An informative paper provided the main purpose of each of the three local government Bills that the Department is taking forward and their current position in the legislative process.
- These are:
 - The Local Government (Contracts and Compulsory Purchase) Bill
 - The Local Government (Finance) Bill
 - The Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill
- A chart will be produced to visually represent the timeline of the Bills.

Any Other Business

- It was noted that NILGA had recently written to Minister Goggins requesting that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) amend the law on co option in order to pave the way for an early severance package.
- NILGA reported that they had also written to Minister Wilson and other members of the Executive requesting that resources be identified to support the Local Government Reform Programme. The Minister said that matter was being carefully considered and he would be responding on behalf of the Executive.

Date of Next Meeting

- The next SLB meeting will be held on 10 April 2009 at 10.00 am.

Communications Joint Secretariat