

Key Outcomes from Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) 22 May 2009

Minutes of Meetings

- Minutes from the previous SLB meeting on 10 April 2009 were approved. The revised minutes will be available soon on the Local Government section of the DOE website and on the NILGA website.
- www.doeni.gov.uk
- www.nilga.org

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

- Panel A confirmed that work is ongoing to develop a community planning framework for councils. This work will be progressed as a matter of urgency to support meaningful community planning trials.
- The Panel highlighted that councils need to be the lead bodies in community planning and therefore departments should take account of this in any related initiatives they are currently working on.
- The Minister confirmed that he would emphasise this point at the Executive Sub-Committee meeting, which is likely to be held in late June / early July, and that he would then circulate a note to all Ministerial colleagues requesting that their departments collaborate with the Department and local government on this matter.

Policy Development Panel B (PDP B) - Service Delivery

- Panel B reported that it was developing guidance for Service Delivery and Performance Improvement, now that the legislative proposals had been agreed. This required some input from PDP A.
- Work was ongoing to draft a Customer Service Framework and to establish appropriate information technology options for local government.
- A steering group has been established to progress a consultancy assignment to develop a Procurement Strategy on behalf of local government.
- Panel B proposed the development of closer working relationships with Transition Committees and Management Teams with regard to IS Strategy and Systems Convergence.

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

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Phase 1 report

- The PwC report detailing options for service delivery models was currently being finalised. This would be presented to Panel C on the 27 May. The final report would be presented to the SLB on 03 July.
- Decisions on the way forward would facilitate progress to Phase 2 of the assignment, which will comprise a full economic appraisal of local government service.

Secondment

- The Panel C paper proposed that the secondment of civil servants to local government should only be accepted in exceptional circumstances, but recommended that further work was required to clearly define the specific exceptions where secondment may be appropriate.
- Minister Wilson recognised the importance of collective consideration of this issue.
- It was agreed that the arrangements for the secondment of civil servants in the health sector should be closely monitored in considering the way forward on local government reform.
- Minister Wilson said that the views of local government on the transfer would be considered carefully by the Executive before final decisions were reached. SLB will be kept apprised of developments.

HR Implementation Issues

- Panel C recommended the establishment of a Local Government Reform Joint Forum to take forward negotiation and consultation on all HR related issues. It proposed that the Forum should consist of two groupings. The employers' side, for local government, the departments with functions transferring and other affected bodies. The second grouping would comprise of NIC / ICTU to represent trade union side. It was

proposed that the Joint Forum should be serviced by a joint secretariat provided by the Local Government Staff Commission and supported by the DOE / NILGA joint secretariat.

- The Minister agreed that the Forum should be established quickly and that he would be considering the accountability arrangements further. Panel C and SLB will be informed of the decision.

Capacity Building

- Substantial work was being carried out by the Capacity Building Working Group of PDP A to finalise and cost a comprehensive training programme for local government and transferring function employees, and elected members.
- The final report will be considered by Panel C on 22 June and then presented to SLB prior to inclusion in the Strategic Outline Business Case.

Finance and Estates

- It was agreed that the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) should take responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations of the Finance and Estates Working Group.
- Minister Wilson noted Panel C's view that the expertise of officials should be retained under RTCG and that Panel C should retain a direct and ongoing role in the implementation process. He asked that these views are taken in to account in the review of Local Government Reform Programme structures.
- Panel C highlighted that detailed work is ongoing in relation to complex financial issues including the striking of rates, Rate Support Grants and the timing on the closing of accounts for the old councils. These issues should be signed off by the Panel for the next SLB meeting.

Vesting Legislation

- Panel C requested that the DOE should bring forward revised vesting legislation to support the implementation of community planning and the Power of Well-Being.
- Minister Wilson explained that this was not crucial to transition and could potentially jeopardise the essential legislation required for local government reform. As a result, the issue would not be dealt with in the legislation to give effect to transition.
- However, Minister Wilson committed to engage with local government and bring forward the necessary legislation as soon as possible after the 2011 transfer date and begin the policy work as soon as possible.

Local Government Implementation Framework

- Members welcomed the Implementation Framework that highlighted the key programme priorities and milestones. Members requested it be circulated widely for information.
- It was highlighted that information in the document was continuously evolving and updates would be circulated on a regular basis.
- Members welcomed the commitment from DOE to seek consultancy support to help develop and deliver an enhanced Programme Management System by September to support effective implementation.

RTCG and Transition Committee Update

- An outline of the RTCG meeting on the 30 April was discussed, including confirmation that RTCG endorsed the Advisory Notes for the Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams on Key Tasks and Milestones and Winding-Up Arrangements. These were issued on 05 May 2009.
- Local government expressed concern about confusion of the role of voluntary Transition Committees needing to approve council capital expenditure projects.
- The Minister confirmed that while approval is not necessary, there should be sharing of information for loan sanctions amongst voluntary Transition Committees as part of their role in considering capital programme convergence. He agreed that the Department should clarify this.

Review of Local Government Reform Programme

- Members agreed a paper detailing a process to review the SLB, PDP and RTCG structures to ensure they are appropriate to meet the needs of the next phase of the Reform Programme.
- NILGA indicated that the chairmanship of the Policy Development Panels was due to change in June. It was felt that it would be wise to defer this until the completion of the Review. NILGA will seek the views of the political parties involved.

AOB

Seminars for Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams

- To support information dissemination and sharing of best practice, it was agreed that a series of seminars would be hosted by the SLB Joint Secretariat with the support of SOLACE to provide guidance and support during the transition process.
- The first of these is due to take place on 06 July.

Planning Reform

- Local government raised concern about the potential delays in Planning Reform, which in turn impacts on the transfer of planning functions as part of the Local Government Reform Programme.
- The Minister confirmed his commitment to transferring the relevant planning functions to the new councils and that it was a matter of priority to reach a resolution.
- Local government confirmed their commitment at party level to finding agreement on the way forward on the outstanding issues.

NILGA Ministerial Engagement

- NILGA informed Minister Wilson of an ongoing set of meetings with other ministers to support work on community planning. A meeting had already taken place with the Regional Development Minister, Conor Murphy, and a meeting with the Health Minister Michael McGimpsey has been arranged for the 02 June.

Severance and Co-Option

- Minister Wilson advised SLB that Minister Goggins has agreed to give further consideration to amending the co-option legislation to avoid by-elections following the outcome of the consultation on severance.

Date of Next Meeting

The next SLB meeting will be held on 03 July 2009 at 10.00 am.

Please note: The information above may be subject to change. This is due to the quick turnaround of information in order to provide a summary as soon as possible after each meeting. The formal minutes will represent the information in finalised format.

Communications Joint Secretariat