

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2007

STORMONT HOTEL BELFAST

Members:	David Cairns MP	Chair
	Cllr Sean McPeake	NILGA President –Vice Chair
	Cllr Mervyn Storey, MLA	DUP
	Cllr Joanne Bunting	DUP NILGA
	Ald Sam Gardiner, MLA	UUP
	Ald Arnold Hatch	UUP NILGA
	Cllr Sean Begley	Sinn Fein NILGA
	Cllr John O’Kane	SDLP
	Cllr Dermot Curran	SDLP NILGA
	Cllr John Mathews	Alliance
	Cllr Tony Hill	Alliance NILGA
	Stephen Peover	DOE
	Paul Simpson	DOE
	John Ritchie	DOE
	David Ferguson	DOE (Planning Service)
	Barney McGahan	DSD (Housing)
	Malcolm McKibbin	DRD (Roads Service)
	Ashley Boreland	LGAdviser (Ards BC)
	John McGrillen	LG Adviser (SoLACE)
Apologies:	Cllr Alex Maskey, MLA	Sinn Fein
Joint Secretariat:	Ian Maye	DOE Joint Secretary
	John Murphy	DOE
	Liz Walker	DOE
	Heather Moorhead	NILGA Joint Secretary
	David Dixon	NILGA
	Claire Martin	NILGA
Presenters:	Chris Stewart	DE
	Denis McMahon	DHSSPS
	Olive Maybin	DFP

Actions

1 Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised members of the full agenda including three departmental presentations. Apologies were noted from Cllr Alex Maskey MLA.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting

2.1 Matters arising –
A member advised that the member list on the minutes should include the Councillor prefix and MLA suffix, where appropriate.

2.2 A member requested that paragraph 1.1 should read “four out of five parties reiterated their objection to the seven council model”.

**Joint Secretariat
to amend
Minutes of the
last Meeting**

3 Matters Arising

3.1 A member advised that SLB papers should be forwarded by 1st class post as agreed at the last meeting, as the use of special delivery can cause inconvenience to Members.

**Joint Secretariat
to action.**

3.2 Staffing and roles and functions of central government planning staff post-RPA implementation: A member advised that NILGA are currently awaiting views from SoLACE and the Local Government Staff Commission on NILGA’s draft paper on Staffing proposals to support the Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels. A further update on progress will be issued to the Board at the next meeting.

**NILGA Joint
Secretariat to
provide update
at next meeting.**

3.3 NILGA Communications Director: The NILGA Joint Secretary informed members that procedures for recruitment are currently being finalised.

4 Presentations

4.1 Presentation from DE

4.1.1 A representative from DE provided a brief presentation on developments in the education sector in relation to RPA. Members were advised that a copy of the presentation would be circulated following the meeting.

**DOE Joint
Secretariat to
circulate DE
presentation.**

4.1.2 During discussion that followed members expressed a range of concerns including the proposed lack of political accountability of the Education Skills and Authority (ESA). The issue of the corrective action procedures currently in place for failing teachers was also highlighted. A member also viewed the number of members on the ESA Board as too restrictive, as it may not provide a sufficient range of expertise and skills, and geographical balance within the Board.

4.1.3 The DE representative advised members that in relation to accountability all proposals had been drawn up in the context of devolution. In relation to corrective action procedures he advised that final decisions will be made by Boards of Governors and the ESA will provide guidance to Boards of Governors when requested. The DE representative advised that work was still in progress on a number of matters.

4.1.4 The Chair advised members that questions on policy issues and decisions are matters for Ministers and therefore cannot be answered by officials. The DE representative stated that he noted the members concerns and advised that he would relay them to the Minister for Education.

4.2 Presentation from DHSSPS

- 4.2.1 A representative from DHSSPS provided members with a presentation on RPA developments within the health and personal social services sector. He drew members attention to the reasons for change, particularly the desire to provide community and patient driven services. Members were advised of the current position of the department and the next steps of the process.
- 4.2.2 A member referred to the emphasis on seven Local Commissioning Groups and asked if this would remain regardless of the number of Local Councils. The DHSSPS representative advised that it was based on the seven council model and that they would have to look at this again if there was a larger number of local councils.
- 4.2.3 A member expressed concern about the inadequate representation of lay people on the Board and questioned the statistical makeup of the patient/client council. The DHSSPS representative advised that work was in progress in this area but that local representation would be included within the Board.
- 4.2.4 A member enquired about job losses and savings. The representative advised that it was anticipated that there would be recurrent savings of £35 million and around 1000 jobs lost overall. He also stated that at present there are 500 vacancies and they are currently working on handling redundancies.

4.3 Presentation from DFP

- 4.3.1 A representative from DFP provided members with a presentation on the RPA Location Policy Guiding Principles. She drew members attention to the guiding principles of the reform policy and the potential tensions between principles. Members were given copies of the Guiding Principles for the Location of Public Sector Jobs in Northern Ireland which issued for consultation on 26 January 2007.
- 4.3.2 In the discussion that followed a member advised that relocation of NI Government Estates Services should be balanced between Belfast and rural area's. A member stated that in terms of jobs, estates will be an important issue especially West of the Bann and as Belfast City Centre always benefited they enquired if some jobs could be relocated to other areas. The Minister indicated that job location policy would be a matter for an incoming Executive.
- 4.3.3 A member referred to the imbalance in public and private sector employment and enquired if the document looked at cutting jobs in the public sector. The representative advised that this document did not look at resourcing implications, it dealt with how to use the estate in a more sustainable manner.
- 4.3.4 A member commented that a number of Guiding Principles had already been issued and asked if these were from DFP. It was explained that these had issued from the Public Service Commission in relation to staffing matters. The Chair agreed that when PSC Guiding Principles are agreed by Central Government and placed in the public domain they would be issued to NILGA.
- 4.3.5 Members suggested that the Chair of the Shared Services, Finance & Estates Policy Development Panel should be included in the process to ensure representation from Local Government. The Chair commented that this was a helpful suggestion which would be relayed to the Minister.
- 4.3.6 A member questioned the proposed bundling of decisions and advised that it makes sense for Local Government to be incorporated within this. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that a number of local issues will require 'bundling' for consideration by the Policy Development Panels.
- 4.3.7 The DFP representative noted members comments and stated that she would refer these to the Minister.

DOE Joint Secretariat to ensure Principles are issued to NILGA.

DOE Joint Secretariat to explore representation from Local Government on the RPA Estate Sub-Group.

5 Stocktake Update from Taskforce Sub Groups: SLB 07/2007

- 5.1 The Chair referred members to the Stocktake paper and indicated that the contents of the report will feed into the development of the Policy Development Panels. The DoE Joint Secretary advised the Board that the Joint Secretariat would wish to develop a more expansive version of the paper as a briefing document for the Policy Development Panels.
- 5.2 Referring to the issue of Central / Local Government Relations the NILGA Joint Secretary indicated that they would be calling for a Statutory Partnership with Central Government. The Chair confirmed that the proposed Partnership Panel would have a statutory basis, based on the Welsh model.
- 5.3 Members raised a number of issues in relation to the work of the Governance Sub-group and asked if the proposed legislation would be prescriptive or permissive about council structures. Concerns were expressed about the explicit definition of key officer roles as these should be a matter for elected members. A member indicated that certain definitions are required to ensure no conflicts of interest arise.
- 5.4 The Chair advised that decision making structures would need to be prescribed at the start, since the new councils would not otherwise have decision making structures, but that policy development work continued.
- 5.5 A member raised the issue of a Commissioner for Local Government to provide a mechanism for dispute resolution at an early stage. The Chair indicated that there is a need to examine what emerges in terms of governance mechanisms before considering intervention mechanisms.

6 Draft Terms of Reference for Strategic Leadership Board: SLB 08/2007

- 6.1 The DOE Joint Secretary advised that following the last meeting members comments had been incorporated to develop revised draft Terms of Reference and Standing Orders. The vice-chair welcomed the thrust of the paper but indicated that further work is required within NILGA in relation to the issue of consensus before agreement can be reached on Terms of Reference and Standing Orders. It was agreed that the DOE Joint Secretary would engage with the NILGA RPA Working Group on the issue prior to the next meeting of the SLB.

DOE Joint Secretary to meet with NILGA.

**Joint Secretariat
to amend the
Standing
Orders.**

- 6.2 A number of members asked for para 9 of the Standing Orders on Quorum to be reworded to convey that decision making rests with elected members and officers are advisors acting in a consultative/advisory role. A number of other drafting points were also identified by members. It was agreed that the paper would be reworked to address these points.
- 6.3 A DUP representative asked that the minutes record their party's view that representation on the SLB and PDP's should be commensurate with party strength in the last Local Government elections.
- 6.4 The NILGA Joint Secretary highlighted that this is a new way of working and format of representation for the local government sector, and that decisions by the Board may not always be what the sector wants. It was accepted that each party has its own processes and that decisions cannot be imposed by the Board.

**7 Establishment of Policy Development Panels:
SLB 09/2007**

- 7.1 Introducing the paper the Chair advised that the changes agreed in relation to the ToR and Standing Orders for the Strategic Leadership Board would be reflected in those for the Policy Development Panels.
- 7.2 A member questioned procedures in place to resolve disagreement between the Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels. The Chair stated that the Strategic Leadership Board is the driving body in the process and there could be issues that the Board may ask the Panels to reconsider.
- 7.3 Members expressed their wish to ensure that a coordination role will be established between each Panel. The DOE Joint Secretary confirmed that it was envisaged that the Chairs and Joint Secretariats of the Panels would meet on a regular basis. It was further highlighted that the Strategic Leadership Board would have a role in identifying cross cutting themes for the Panels to examine, as set out in the Terms of Reference of the Board.
- 7.4 In the discussion that followed members raised a number of drafting points that they considered would provide greater clarity in relation to the membership of and arrangements for the operation of the Policy Development Panels. A DUP representative restated their party's position that membership of the Policy Development Panels should be commensurate with party strength in the last Local Government elections.

7.5 The Chair agreed that the Joint Secretariat should take on board the comments from members and other technical changes to prepare revised papers for circulation to members. He stressed that he wanted the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for both the Strategic Leadership Board and the Policy Development Panels to be agreed at the next meeting.

Joint Secretariat to prepare revised papers for circulation to members.

7.6 The Chair sought the Board's agreement for the phased introduction of the Policy Development Panels. In response to questions from members on the timeframe, the DOE Joint Secretary indicated that the aim would be to have all Panels established within six or eight weeks of the first Panel being established. Members confirmed that they should be established in the following order:

- Capacity Building and Human Resources
- Governance and Community Planning
- Transfer of Functions
- Estates, Shared Services and Finance
- Central / Local Government Relations and Performance Management

8 Reform programme implementation costs update: SLB 10/2007

8.1 The NILGA Joint Secretary advised members that work was ongoing to finalise the NILGA Business Case for funding support, for submission to DOE. The DoE Joint Secretary acknowledged that while the DOE was prepared to commit to funding the PDP Secretariat posts, NILGA was not in a position to commit to recruiting staff to the PDP secretariats prior to agreement on the corporate management structures within NILGA.

NILGA to submit Business Case to DOE for consideration.

8.2 It was agreed that work should progress on the development of appropriate recruitment processes for the NILGA PDP secretariat staff but that no appointments should be made until there was clarity and agreement on NILGA's funding requirements as a whole.

9 Update on legislative proposals: SLB 11/2007

9.1 The Chair advised members that the progress and timetable outlined in the paper related to the draft Orders being taken forward through Westminster. The restoration of devolution would restart the legislative process.

10 Paper on Planning Service Staff: SLB 12/2007

- 10.1 The Chair invited David Ferguson to speak to the paper on Planning Service Staffing.
- 10.2 David Ferguson advised members that the figures outlined were approximate only. He advised that the figures had been developed by looking at the functions being discharged and estimated that 80% of Planning Service staff would transfer the new local councils. He also advised that the Department had engaged consultants to benchmark the figures against other jurisdictions.
- 10.3 The Chair advised members that the Planning Service was under extreme pressure at present due to the large numbers of staff joining the private sector alongside increased rate of applications. Nevertheless the Chair confirmed that members concerns would be noted.
- 10.4 During the discussion that followed a member expressed concern regarding the level of jobs proposed to remain at central government in comparison to the dramatically lower levels of Planning Staff within Scotland and Ireland's central departments. David Ferguson advised members of the differences in functions between the central units in each jurisdiction and stressed the need to compare "like with like" in order to obtain a balanced view.
- 10.5 A number of members advised that local government would need adequate staffing levels to handle the anticipated level of applications, and capacity building processes in place to deliver effective planning for the transition. It was also suggested that a skills audit should be undertaken for those transferring, and at the strategic policy level.
- 10.6 David Ferguson acknowledged that a range of issues need to be addressed within the Planning Service to assist the transition process. He also highlighted the current high levels of uncertainty hindering the process including devolution, and uncertainty over the number of councils that might be agreed by a devolved administration.

11 AOB

- 11.1 A member advised that DARD were attempting to use the seven council model for consultation on setting up new rural development arrangements to meet EU targets. The Chair noted members concerns in relation to the matter and said that he would consider the issue with his DARD officials.

DOE Joint Secretariat to raise with DARD officials.

- 11.2 The vice-chair expressed his gratitude on behalf of the members to the Chair for his co-operation with NILGA and the political parties throughout the process to date.

12 Date of Next Meeting

- 12.1 It was agreed that the next meeting would be scheduled for April 2007 with the date and venue to be confirmed.

Joint Secretariat to confirm date and venue of next meeting.