

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE
FINANCE SUB-GROUP**

**MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JUNE 2006
AT 2pm IN NEWRY & MOURNE COUNCIL OFFICES, TRAINING SUITE**

MINUTES

Present:	Leo O'Reilly	DFP (Chair)
	Cllr Jim White	DUP
	Cllr Gary Stokes	SDLP
	Dara O'Hagan	Sinn Fein
	David Bell	Chair of ALGFO/Coleraine Borough Council
	Richard Lewis	Moyle District Council
	Trevor Salmon	Belfast City Council
	Brona Slevin	Craigavon Borough Council
	Joe Campbell	Derry City Council
	Brendan Hegarty	Fermanagh District Council
	John Buchanan	Local Government Audit Office
	Julie Anderson	DFP – Central Expenditure Division
	Marie Finnegan	DOE – Local Government Division
	Felicity Boyd	DOE – Local Government Division (Legislation)
	John McNeill	DRD – Roads Service
	Derek Baker	DSD – Resources, Housing and Social Security Group
	Brenda Dickson	DOE - Local Government Division (Secretariat)

Action

1. Introductions/Apologies

Apologies were recorded from Cllr Alan Lawther, Alliance Party; Dave Clarke, Ards Borough Council; Ian Eagleson, Carrickfergus Borough Council; Richard Pengelly, DFP Central Expenditure Division; Donald Henry, DRD Finance; and Peter Aiken, DOE Central Finance.

Members were advised that the UUP nominee, Cllr Vera McWilliam is unable to take up her place on the group, due to family illnesses. Her substitute Cllr Norman Hillis, MLA is also unable to attend in her absence, as meetings are scheduled for Tuesdays and these clash with Assembly commitments. Members were further advised that alternative nominees had been provided and the names of the main member and substitute are Cllr Ross Hussey and Ald Jim Dillon, respectively.

2. Draft minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 23 May 2006

Two minor adjustments were suggested to the draft minutes of 23 May 2006. These were agreed and will be reflected in the approved version, which will be placed on the website.

DoE

3. Matters Arising

i) Minutes of meeting on 15 May 2006

- *Ian Eagleson's query about the effective date of The District Electoral Areas (NI) Order 2007*

Felicity Boyd advised members that the December 2008 date for the District Electoral Areas Order was to be brought forward, to ensure that the necessary provisions are in place before the Local Government elections in the autumn of 2008.

ii) Minutes of meeting on 23 May 2006

- *Local Government Reform Website*

Members had been advised of the link to the Local Government Reform website. They were also advised that the membership of the Finance Sub-Group and the approved minutes of 25 April and 15 May meetings have now been placed on this site.

- *Amendments to TOR and Options Paper – Equality issues*

Dara O'Hagan's suggestions relating to equality issues had been submitted electronically and were now reflected in the updated documents.

4. Terms of Reference for the Sub-Group – Final Draft

Discussion took place on the Draft Terms of Reference. Dara O'Hagan advised that consultation with the Sinn Fein Party would be required before she would be in a position to sign up to this document. She indicated that consultation would take place before the next meeting. Also, the Chairman suggested that the Terms of Reference should be forwarded to the new UUP member for comment, before these could be finalised.

DO'H

DoE

5. LGT Finance Sub-Group Report – First Draft (2 June 2006)

Julie Anderson provided a brief overview of the Draft Local Government Taskforce Finance Sub-Group Report. The Chairman explained that the first draft was a framework that required a lot more work. He then presented a more detailed analysis of the paper, inviting comments from members. Members participated fully in the wide discussion that followed and many comments and suggestions were put forward. Cllr Lawther's comments, which had been e-mailed in advance of the meeting, were also tabled.

In an effort to capture the numerous points made, the Chair requested that members submit their comments in writing to the secretariat, as soon as possible and before Wednesday 14 June 2006. Again, he recommended that the views of the new UUP representative should be sought.

**ALL
DoE**

Action

David Bell and John Buchanan were asked to provide a few paragraphs on the Financial Regulatory Framework, for inclusion in the final report.

DB/JB

The Chair advised members that early responses would enable a second draft of the report to be circulated in sufficient time for the next meeting. He thanked them for their patience, recognising that documents were sometimes circulated close to meetings. He explained that this was due to the level of work involved between meetings which are, by necessity, very close together.

6. Identification of relevant legislation – Update

A paper on current DoE finance-related legislation (**LGT/FSG No. 9**) was tabled by Marie Finnegan. She explained that this was the second stage of this exercise and that the list of provisions had now been categorised, together with some comments.

General discussion took place on this paper and members were asked to consider the detail and forward their comments to the secretariat. Any gaps in the list of legislation should also be highlighted. David Bell agreed to submit a paper to DoE, which included ALGFO's comments on some of the legislative issues.

ALL

DB

Julie Anderson advised members that she was currently working on the finance related legislation for all other Departments and would provide members with an update.

JA

Marie Finnegan advised members that DoE had received a letter from HM Revenue & Customs, raising a VAT related issue arising from the reorganisation of local government in Northern Ireland. It was suggested that legislation may need to be amended to protect councils' current VAT refund status. This correspondence has been passed to DFP for advice.

DFP

7. Any other Business

A list of discussion papers produced by the group was circulated. Members were asked to consider which papers could be made available on the Local Government Reform website. It was suggested that most papers could be submitted for inclusion, but identifying those which are complete and those which are work-in-progress. Members agreed that the draft TOR and the draft LGTFSG Report should not be placed on the website until in final format.

DoE

Dara O'Hagan requested electronic copies of papers which had been tabled at the meeting.

DoE

The Chair thanked Cllr Stokes for inviting the group to Newry & Mourne for this meeting and for his Council's hospitality. He also thanked the Chief Executive, Thomas McCall, for welcoming members and arranging refreshments.

Action

8. Date and Location of next meeting

The date and time of the next meeting is **20 June 2006 at 10.00am**. Craigavon was being explored as a possible venue, due to its central location. Brona Slevin, Craigavon Borough Council agreed to check the Council's new meeting rooms, to ascertain if they would be a suitable size for the group. Details will be confirmed as soon as possible.

BS

DoE

It was also agreed that a further meeting would be held on **27 June 2006 at 10.00am**. The venue for this meeting has yet to be agreed.

Brenda Dickson
June 2006