

1. **PRESENT**

ACTION

Maureen Taggart (Chair)	Dir. of Personnel & Management Services NIHE
Paul Lowe	Personnel Officer NIHE
Wendy Hunter	DoE
Neal Willis	Director of Central Services Newtownabbey
Ivor Paisley	Director of Corporate Services Cookstown
Linda Leahy	Professional Officer LGSC
Cllr Dermot Curran	SDLP
Sharon Currans	PPMA
Cllr Robin Newton	DUP
Eddy Curtis	Director of Administration Newry & Mourne
Carmel Connolly	PPMA
Adrian Donaldson	Chief Executive Castlereagh
Stanley Black	Head of HR Belfast City Council
Marie Cochrane	DoE
Jacqueline McKee	Head of Employment Devt. Equality Commission
Alison Millar	NIPSA
John Adams	NIJC
Cllr Tom Hartley	Sinn Fein
Cllr Jimmy Spratt	NIJC
Cllr Sara Duncan	Alliance Party
Joan Kinnaird	Head of HR Ballymoney
Jamie Ward	APSE

John McAreavey and Speers Charters of DoE attended the meeting as observers.

2. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Kate Lagan and from Rodger McKnight who was substituted at the meeting by Joan Kinnaird.

3. **AGENDA AND PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The Chair opened the meeting and introduced the agenda. The previous minutes were ratified.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

It was highlighted to the group that none of the working 'sub-groups' were chaired by a councillor and that it may have been prudent to have the councillors more involved in this way. The Chair advised that these were not sub-groups, but researchers tasked with bringing papers to the full group and that volunteers had been sought at the outset.

5. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair outlined the terms of reference for the sub-group and asked if there were any objections to them. The terms of reference were agreed.

6. **REPORT FROM CHAIRS GROUP**

The Chair briefed the group on the recent meeting amongst the sub-group Chairs clarifying that the focus was to be on HR issues at a high level and ultimately to inform legislation. The groups were to be wound up upon completion of this work at the end of June / early July 2006.

7. **THEME UPDATES**

The Chair asked the various researchers to introduce their respective draft papers on each of the workstreams.

- a) A paper on 'Structures' was introduced followed by a brief discussion. While the emergent evidence was that previous reorganisations had legislated only for the appointment of a 'Head of Paid Service' thereby leaving structures to be decided by individual councils, there was a view that some work could be done around the development of best practice models of service delivery. It was suggested that this work might best be done during the implementation stages and that a timeline could be produced highlighting all issues to be addressed during implementation. A recommendation was put forward that any new structures should be developed in consultation with the relevant trade unions.
- b) A report on 'Filling the Structures' was introduced for discussion. The emerging advice was that the Cabinet Office guidelines on staff transfers would apply. The group asked to be supplied with a copy of the guidelines.

Paul Lowe

The appointment of the Head of Paid Service by a panel of elected members from the shadow authority was identified as the preferred option; however difficulties around the timing were highlighted. It was suggested that a possible recommendation could be to establish a political panel nominated by the Parties prior to shadow council elections as a mechanism to develop Job Descriptions etc. during the implementation phase. Proposal to be developed and documented for agreement at a future meeting.

Maureen Taggart

The issue of a moratorium on the filling of posts was raised with a view expressed that this had the potential over a period of time to reduce services to the rate-payer. The group was informed that the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) and the Public Service Commission (PSC) intended to issue relevant guidance later in the year.

The group discussed the issue of 'interim appointments'. Difficulties were identified including possible delays to the overall process, vacancies created should existing Clerks apply for interim posts, and ownership of the new structures. A consensus emerged that interim arrangements would not be appropriate in these circumstances.

A range of options on the issue of eligibility were outlined. Differing views were expressed on the issue of public advertisement including best practice, the need for transparency, equality issues around current imbalances, trade union opposition, time and cost constraints and the recent decisions made by the Health Service.

Questions were raised regarding the possibility of redundancy compensation being offered at Civil Service levels and how any associated costs would be met. Paper covering compensation to be introduced at next meeting.

Maureen Taggart

The need for support to be made available to the councils in dealing with HR issues during the transition period was highlighted.

- c) A paper on the 'Harmonisation of Terms and Conditions' was introduced. The evidence compiled pointed to a preference to aim to harmonise terms and conditions pre-transfer if possible. The group was informed that the Scottish experience showed that only one of thirty-two councils had achieved post-transfer harmonisation to date. Furthermore if harmonisation was unachievable within an agreed period of time then there should be a fall-back to a default set of terms and conditions. It was agreed that these issues should be addressed at an early stage during implementation. The Chair indicated that this would be documented as discussed.

Maureen Taggart

- d) Papers were introduced on 'The Future of HR Delivery' and 'Shared Services'. It was highlighted that there was no need to legislate on this issue since current legislation was sufficient to allow councils to implement their own solutions. It was pointed out that in terms of ratios of HR staff to employees, Local Government was currently performing well. It was further highlighted that the emerging message on shared services was that they might not always be the best way to go. It was suggested that it was too early to consider shared services at this stage given the other work which had to be completed during the reorganisation in the short timescale allowed. Furthermore the importance of maintaining continuity of service in critical functions such as payroll was emphasised. Arrangements to be made to link this work into Shared Services sub-group.

Wendy Hunter

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair was asked for clarification on what would happen with the output from the HR Sub Group during the implementation period. Clarification was also sought on the future roles of the LGSC and the N.I. Joint Council. To seek clarification and report back.

Maureen Taggart

9. **DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

The meeting scheduled for Monday 12th June 2006 was **cancelled** to allow the researchers to pull together their report in the light of views expressed to date.

The 3rd meeting of the HR Sub-Group would be held on **Monday 19th June 2006 at 2.00pm** in the Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast.