

# TASKFORCE POLITICAL PANEL

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2006

### AT DUNDONALD HOUSE

#### ATTENDEES:

Lord Rooker	DOE Minister of State (Chairperson)
Stephen Peover	DOE Permanent Secretary
Sean Neeson	Alliance
Maurice Morrow	Democratic Unionist Party
Alex Maskey	Sinn Féin
John O'Kane	Social Democratic & Labour Party
Sam Gardiner	Ulster Unionist Party
Cynthia Smith	DOE
Grace McGuinness	DOE
Liz Walker	DOE
Joanne Bunting	DUP NILGA Representative
Helen Quigley	SDLP NILGA Representative
Arnold Hatch	UUP NILGA Representative
Heather Moorhead	NILGA
Michael Rickard	NILGA

#### Action

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Political Advisory Panel and thanked everyone for attending. Four of the five parties present, DUP, UUP, SDLP and Alliance reiterated their opposition to the creation of the seven council model. The Minister acknowledged these views but confirmed that decisions had been made and were final. He stressed that the role of the Taskforce was to help shape future local government and inform the implementation process and he also stressed a strong desire for parties to play a full role in this. Members agreed to work with the process provided it did not compromise the position of those who opposed the seven council model.

Further information was sought on the detail of what would transfer to local government as a result of the RPA announcements of November 2005 and March 2006. It was agreed that this information would be provided in as far as possible to parties at the next meeting.

**DoE**

2. Discussion took place on the Taskforce terms of reference. Members were asked to consider the terms of reference which are still in draft form and submit any suggestions for change which will be considered and incorporated if appropriate. It was stressed that the TOR had been drafted to reflect both the needs of modernisation as well as implementation of RPA decisions. Terms of reference were

**All political parties**

also being considered by the taskforce working group.

It was noted that NILGA had produced a paper on the Vision of Local Government and that this could help inform the Terms of Reference. This paper had also been referred to in the Working Group meeting and members were advised that it had been circulated for consideration to help inform revision of the Terms of Reference.

3. Panel members next considered the Taskforce structure including the role and remit of sub groups. Concerns were raised about the role of groups, how chairs were appointed and the involvement of elected members. It was confirmed that the role of groups was to bring forward proposals to inform policy and legislation and to scope the major implementation issues. Chairs were selected on the basis that they brought some knowledge and or expertise to the process and were willing to undertake the role. The commitment to member involvement was re emphasised and the Chair asked each party to nominate one person to each sub group.

4. Members were provided with a short briefing on the legislative timetable. Local Government Division would be taking forward three Orders in Council. The first is the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2006 which will provide for:

- seven new local government districts to be formed;
- the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner; and
- the division of each district into wards.

The drafting of this Order is complete and was laid at Westminster during March 2006. It would be debated in Parliament during April 2006 and made in Privy Council in May 2006.

The Second Order is the Local Government Restructuring Order. Drafting of this Order is due to commence in September 2006. All policy areas to be included in the Order must therefore be developed before September 2006 to enable instructions to be sent to the Office of Legislative Council (OLC) by no later than September 2006.

A third order, the Transfer of Functions Order would be taken forward within the same timetable.

Members raised the issue of the location of the new councils. The

## Action

5. Chair confirmed that this would be a decision for the new councils. Concerns were expressed about the difficulty of making such decisions and about how such difficulties could be resolved, It was suggested that this was an issue that the Estate Sub-group would consider and should be raised in this context.
  
6. Members asked if they could be supplied with copies of all minutes of meetings. The Chair advised everyone that this would be a clear and transparent process and all minutes would be published on the DOE website after all minutes were approved by all members concerned.

## DoE

The members asked if they could be supplied with a brief remit on each sub-group to enable them to appoint a suitable representative.

## Date for Next Meeting

7. Members asked that we develop a schedule for this panel to meet and suggested that it should meet as soon as possible after the next working group meeting.

