

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2007

BELFAST CITY HALL

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 Alex Maskey MLA	Sinn Fein
	Cllr John Mathews	Alliance
	Cllr Tony Hill	Alliance NILGA
	Cllr John O’Kane	SDLP
	Cllr Dermot Curran	SDLP NILGA
	Stephen Peover	DOE
	Paul Simpson	DOE
	John Ritchie	DOE
	David Ferguson	DOE (Planning Service)
	Barney McGahan	DSD (Housing)
	Jeff Allister	DRD (Roads Service)
	Ashley Boreland	LG Adviser (Ards Borough Council)
	John McGrillen	LG Adviser (SoLACE Chair)

Apologies: Cllr Sean Begley Sinn Fein NILGA

Joint Secretariat: Ian Maye DOE Joint Secretary
John Murphy DOE
Liz Walker DOE
Heather Moorhead NILGA Joint Secretary
David Dixon NILGA
Claire Martin NILGA

Actions

1 Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board and invited everyone to introduce themselves. Four of the five parties reiterated their objection to the seven council model. The Chair noted their objection but stated that he hoped that this group could carry on from the work of the Political Panel in taking forward the modernisation and reform programme for local government.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting

- 2.1 Matters arising – a member advised that under Panel Papers the sentence should read “five working days”.
- 2.2 Resources – a member advised that this should read “a DoE official informed the group”.
- 2.3 Staffing and roles and functions of central government planning staff post-RPA implementation – a member asked if a breakdown on the 160-170 staffing figures could be provided to indicate what functions would be delivered by planning staff within central government post-RPA implementation. The Chair agreed that Planning Service would produce a short briefing paper for the next meeting. The Board was advised that Planning Service had commissioned work to refine staffing estimates and that this should be finalised in the next couple of months. A member advised the Board that NILGA’s Employers Secretary had prepared a paper on the appointment of Local Government Officers to support the Board and the Policy Development Panels. It was confirmed that SoLACE and the Local government Staff Commission were being consulted on the report at present. The NILGA joint Secretary advised that they would provide an update on this at the next meeting of the Board.

**David Ferguson
to produce
briefing paper
for the next
meeting**

**NILGA Joint
Secretary to
provide update
on report at the
next meeting**

3 Matters Arising

- 3.1 Central Joint Forum: A member asked for reassurance that this is not a negotiating forum. Members were advised that the CJF provides for engagement between Government and the trades unions affiliated to NIC-ICTU, and the Government’s most senior officials are charged with taking forward those discussions and that it is not a negotiating forum.
- 3.2 Funding: A member enquired if any work had been taken forward on the funding issues surrounding the functions that will transfer to local government. Member’s expressed concern that Local Government would be subject to underfunding. Members were advised that work in this area would be taken forward by the Transferring Functions Policy Development Panel.
- 3.3 NILGA Principles: A member asked if consideration had been given to the paper tabled in July 2006 by NILGA in relation to the Principles that should underpin the reform process and in particular the transfer of functions. The Board was advised that the development of the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Leadership Board and the Policy Development Panels would be informed by the paper and the Principles it

outlined. In addition, in developing papers for consideration by the Board and the Policy Development Panels, the joint secretariat would seek to produce agreed papers.

3.4 Other Issues not addressed: A member advised that a number of issues raised in previous discussions, such as local government's concern about the transfer of responsibility for the provision of traveller's sites and the Supporting People programme, in relation to the potential transfer of Workplace 2010 buildings to local government, and in relation to the transfer of greater responsibility for local economic development and tourism development had yet to be addressed. Members were advised that there are a wide range of issues which need to be addressed but that these will be taken forward by the relevant Policy Development Panels and that it was the role of the Strategic Leadership Board to ensure that these areas are addressed by the Panels.

3.5 Taskforce Sub-Groups: A member asked if a stocktake paper could be provided on actions in relation to the recommendations of the Taskforce Sub-Groups. The Chair agreed that a paper would be produced for the next meeting.

**DOE Secretariat
to produce
stocktaking
paper for next
meeting**

4 Strategic Leadership Board Meeting Logistics: SLB 01/2007

4.1 The joint Secretaries spoke to the paper. A member asked how the minutes would be agreed. It was confirmed that the joint secretariat would forward draft minutes to members within five working days of the last meeting seeking comments on accuracy. Any comments would be incorporated and a revised set of minutes issued prior to the next meeting for agreement at the meeting. This process would not preclude members from identifying further amendments at the meeting. A member asked if names would be attributed to comments and action points. The group was advised that should a member ask for their name to be attributed to remarks that the joint secretariat would do so. In addition, action points agreed at the meeting would be attributed to the relevant individual, or to the secretariat, in a column to the right of the main text.

4.2 A member enquired whether it was possible for deputies to attend. The group was advised that the presumption should be against deputies attending, but that there may be occasions where, as a consequence of the business under discussion, it was essential for a substitute to attend to deal with a specific issue.

**Joint Secretariat
to consider
requests for
substitution on a
case by case
basis**

4.3 Discussion then took place on the issue of venues for the meetings of the Board and Policy Development Panels. The

Chair indicated that he was content for meetings to take place outside the Belfast area but that the Board would need to be aware of the potential signals that using particular council offices might send. After some discussion, the Board agreed that it should meet a venue within the Belfast area, close to Parliament Buildings, if possible. The group was advised that NILGA had written to Local Councils to establish if it would be possible to use their facilities for meetings of the Policy Development Panels. The Board agreed that each Policy Development Panel should meet consistently at the same venue.

Joint Secretariat will arrange for future SLB meetings to take place in Belfast

Joint Secretariat to arrange.

5 Draft Terms of Reference for Strategic Leadership Board: SLB 02/2007

5.1 The DOE joint Secretary spoke to the paper, outlining that this was an initial draft of the ToR, drawing on the IDeA report, to inform discussion. He indicated that the ToR for the Strategic Leadership Board include generic ToR for the Policy Development Panels to establish a clear link between the two levels. Members raised the issue of decision making and governance arrangements for meetings; in response it was indicated that a paper covering these issues, drawing on the Welsh Partnership Model would be prepared for the next meeting.

5.2 A member expressed his concern at the proposal to revert agreement on the ToR to the next meeting and the impact this would have on the timetable. The Chair acknowledged this concern but highlighted the importance of ensuring that we get this aspect right at an early stage. There was broad support for this view and the general thrust of the draft ToR. It was agreed that members should submit their views to the Joint Secretariat to inform the preparation of revised Terms of Reference for discussion and agreement at the next meeting.

Members To submit their views in advance of the next meeting

Joint Secretariat to prepare amended ToR paper for agreement at the next meeting

6 Reform programme implementation costs update: SLB 03/2007

6.1 The joint Secretaries spoke to the paper. Members were advised that NILGA was preparing a Business Case on the costs of restructuring to support the reform programme and that when completed these would be factored into a revised paper by the joint secretariat for discussion by the Board.

Joint Secretariat to prepare update paper for next meeting

6.2 Referring to the paragraph 6 of the paper a member raised the issue of severance payments and the provision of information on this aspect to allow councillors to make decisions on their future role. Members were advised that the primary power would be contained in the draft Local Government (Structures) Order. The Chair indicated that the new remuneration arrangements for councillors would provide for a fixed allowance rather than the current attendance allowance. A member asked what sanctions would be in place to ensure councillors attended meetings under such a regime. Members were advised that this would be a matter for individual councils.

6.3 The DOE joint Secretary drew members' attention to the final action point in the paper and advised that a paper would be tabled at the next meeting outlining options for the phased establishment of the Policy Development Panels, and their staffing. A member commented that the Board needs to consider those panels that can complete their tasks quickly.

**Joint Secretariat
to prepare paper
for agreement at
the next meeting**

7 Update report on draft legislation: SLB 04/2007

7.1 A member asked why in the light of the debate around and opposition to the 7 council model the legislators are not building in flexibility with a 'get out' clause. The Chair reminded members that the number of councils is already set in primary legislation and in the absence of devolution this will remain the position. In response to an enquiry from a member on whether NILGA would have an opportunity to comment on the draft proposals members were advised that it is the intention to bring them to the Strategic Leadership Board prior to public consultation.

DOE Secretariat

7.2 In relation to the transfer of functions a member indicated that issues identified in relation to the transfer of functions proposed by DETI had not been resolved. In response the DOE joint Secretary advised that the draft Order is concerned with the legislative requirements for the transfer of functions. He went on to remind members that the earlier discussions in the Political Panel had informed the drafting of legislation and the practical outworking of the transfers would be the responsibility of the Policy Development Panels and their Task and Finish Groups. Against this background it will be important to ensure that all the aspects falling to the Policy Development Panels are captured in their ToR to bring this work into the mainstream of the Taskforce programme.

8 Developing 'A Vision for Local Government': SLB 05/2007

8.1 The Chair introduced the paper and commented that some of the issues had been discussed previously. Speaking to the paper the DOE joint Secretary highlighted the Political Panel's desire to see a joint vision for the future of local government. The need for a shared vision to inform the debate had also been highlighted during the IDeA review of the Taskforce. He reported that following discussions with NILGA, DOE proposed appointing a consultant to coordinate and facilitate a process of consultation and stakeholder engagement to develop and articulate this Vision.

8.2 In response to a query from a member about the role of the project Steering Group, members were advised that if the Strategic Leadership Board is content a small group would be established to manage the project, as set out in the paper. It was reported that the use of consultants is proposed rather than using in-house resources to meet the agreed timetable and to bring independence to the process. A member commented that the outcomes would need to cover equality, and the Chair agreed that it should reference 'A Shared Future' while providing a tight specific report that can be readily agreed. A member raised concerns that the work should be completed at a minimum cost to avoid criticism on undue expenditure for consultants. Those concerns were echoed and shared by the Chair, who asked for the costs to be tightly constrained.

**DOE Secretariat
to include a
reference in
tender
documentation
and to ensure
that costs are
constrained**

9 Social Partner Involvement: SLB 06/2007

9.1 The Chair spoke to the paper on Social Partner involvement. He acknowledged that opinions had been divided in previous discussions on the potential direct representation of the social partners on the Strategic Leadership Board. As he had said previously, he viewed elected members as the primary drivers of the reform process. However, whilst not wishing to take any action that would take away from the primacy of elected members, he believed that the Board would benefit from the involvement of people with a stake in the reform process who were not from central or local government. Names had now been put forward, as set out in the paper, and he wanted to hear members views.

9.2 A member voiced opposition to the proposal on the basis that the aim is for the Strategic Leadership Board to be led by politicians, drawing in expertise as required. They added that there is already an opportunity for the social partners to feed in views through the Social Partners Forum. The inclusion of social partners on the Board will dilute its purpose. This view

was supported by another member who added that the proposal went beyond the recommendations in the IDeA report on the composition of the Strategic Leadership Board. The proposal would provide two opportunities for social partners, who are not elected, to influence the reform agenda

- 9.3 Others were supportive of the involvement of social partners highlighting that it would be useful to have access to the experiences they can bring to the discussions. A member highlighted an original proposal for the appointment of three non-executive members and suggested that the option of involving such external experts should be explored further. Thanking members for their views the Chair recognised the reasons for the position of some members and indicated that he would consider the views expressed by members carefully and seek to address their concerns before making a final decision.

Chair to consider members views

10 AOB

- 10.1 A member raised the pressing need for NILGA to appoint a Communication Director and that funding would be required for the post. Members were advised that the DOE was prepared to examine a detailed request for this support separate from the main Business Case for central Government financial support for the restructuring of NILGA, and would be prepared to offer up to £40k funding support towards the post. A member highlighted the need to be careful in employing someone if the process is delayed under devolution. The view was expressed that this was not a significant risk given the extent of the modernisation and reform programme that is not linked to the seven council model.

NILGA Joint Secretary to prepare detailed request for Communications Director funding support.

- 10.2 The Board was advised that following requests from members senior officials from Health and Education will give presentations on the outworking of the RPA in their sectors at the next meeting.

11 Date of Next Meeting

- 11.1 It was agreed that the next meeting will take place at 10am on Monday 5 February 2007, at a venue in close proximity to Stormont (to be confirmed)

Joint Secretariat to confirm venue