

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE

SHARED SERVICES SUB GROUP

**Minute of meeting on 10 May 2006
at Armagh City & District Council Offices**

Attendees:

Ian Maye – Chair
Cllr Tom Ekin – Belfast City Council
Ray Wright – DFP
Jim Wilkinson – DOE Planning Service
Canice O'Rourke – Down District Council
Joan McCaffrey – Omagh District Council
Cllr Marion Smith – North Down Borough Council
Moira McVeigh – North Down Borough Council / NILGA representative
Philip Irwin – Strategic Investment Board
Rose Crozier – Belfast City Council
Ciaran Quigley – Belfast City Council
Lorna Parsons – LGSC
Ellen Cavanagh – Derry City Council
Morris Crum – Larne Borough Council
Cllr Paul Bettison – IDeA
Richard Cummins - IDeA
Cllr Jim Wells – Down District Council
Jim Stewart – DOE Local Government Division
Alistair Morgan – CEHOG
Cllr Seamus Shields – Omagh District Council
Graham Byrne – SWaMP
Colin McMinn – DHSSPS (Fire & Rescue Service)
Tom McCabe – Fermanagh District Council
Fergus Devitt – DFP
Roger Wilson – Armagh City & District Council
John Quinn – ARC 21
Bob Stronge – NICVA
Janet Cooper – DOE
Greg Magee – DOE

Apology – Sharon Logue – Newtownabbey Borough Council

Welcome & Introductions

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Local Government Taskforce Shared Services sub group and briefly outlined the structure of the Taskforce and its three key elements – the political panel, the working group and the nine thematic sub groups. He explained that the purpose of the shared services sub group was to identify those areas that might require primary legislation and to bring

forward proposals for the delivery of a range of shared services across local government. He advised that this required:

- Identifying the principles underlying the delivery of shared services;
- Identifying which services could be delivered on a shared basis;
- Identifying and developing the legislative model/models to enable shared services to be delivered; and
- Planning for the implementation and delivery of shared services so that by 2009 the new councils can operate effectively.

Legislative Timetable

2. The Chair advised that drafting of the Local Government Restructuring Order was due to commence in September 2006. All policy areas to be included in the Order must therefore be developed before that date to enable instructions to be sent to the Office of Legislative Council by October 2006. The sub group therefore has to provide its recommendations, including any preferred options, by the end of June 2006 for consideration by the Local Government Taskforce and ultimately Ministers, before decisions are made for legislation purposes.

IDeA Peer Presentations

3. Richard Cummins, (IDeA officer peer) former chief executive both within local government in England and the NHS, and Paul Bettison, (IDeA member peer) leader of Bracknell Forest Local Authority, gave short presentations detailing their background and experiences in shared services. Both advised that this was a major opportunity for change within local government in Northern Ireland.
4. It was pointed out that shared services is not a new concept but has been operating in Northern Ireland to some extent, since 1973, for example, in the areas of refuse collection, building control, etc. Certain provisions for shared services already existed within the 1972 Act. The Chair recognised the good work carried out by Councils to date and assured members that there was no fixed political agenda for the local government reform agenda and members had a real opportunity to produce policy proposals to inform legislation to give flexibility to deliver a new shared service model(s) which will ensure best possible services in future.
5. The Chair advised that sharing services would be on a voluntary opt in / opt out basis, however local government bodies would have to prepare a business case demonstrating value for money if they wished to opt out. He added that some services may be mandatory, such as the fire and rescue services.

Terms of Reference

6. The Chair advised that the draft terms of reference (TOR) had been considered by the Taskforce Working Group but it had been agreed that each sub group should consider and agree its own specific TOR. He then asked for comments from members.
7. It was suggested that the name of the sub group should be reconsidered as the sharing of services would be on a voluntary basis but after discussion it was agreed that, whilst not ideal, the name should remain unchanged.
8. The Chair was asked how the sub group's relationship with other sub groups would be facilitated. He advised that this had been raised at a recent political panel meeting and the DOE Permanent Secretary had arranged to meet with the chairs of the nine sub groups during May to discuss progress to date and consider any cross cutting issues. In addition, it had been agreed that minutes from sub group meetings would be circulated to the political panel, working group and other sub groups. They will also be posted to the DOE website once agreed. The Chair went on to say that both the political panel and the working group would play a crucial role in integrating the work of the sub groups.
9. It was suggested that the legislative changes required should be identified which would enable the key issues to be prioritised and reflected in bullet point order within the TOR, and circulated in advance of the next sub group meeting.
10. It was agreed that the final point in the draft TOR should be amended to read: "exploiting synergies between the work of the shared services sub group and other sub groups of the Local Government Taskforce".
11. Discussion took place around the linkages with other central government Departments, eg Health and Education and it was agreed that this should also be reflected in the TOR.
12. With reference to the second bullet point in the draft TOR, it was accepted that it was important to define the principles that might underlie the choice, governance and delivery of shared services.
13. It was pointed out that shared services should not only consider best value but also uniformity of approach in service delivery. The Chair agreed that mechanisms for coherent and transparent decision making would have to be built into the process but that a key element would also be local flexibility.
14. It was suggested that the TOR could be more explicit regarding the mandatory and optional elements of shared services. In relation to the

issue of governance, it was suggested that specific reference be made to political oversight.

Work Areas

15. The Chair advised of the need to decide and prioritise the key work areas within shared services and suggested that the first task was to determine which of the areas required primary legislation.
16. The sub group considered the **Fire and Rescue Services** which currently operates as a regionalised service. This body was recently reconstituted under a 12-member Board and any proposed changes to this Board would require primary legislation. There was some discussion on whether the body should continue as a regional service. It was pointed out that this model is a very successful one as demonstrated by the performance indicators. **It was agreed that the DHSSPS representative would draft a position paper looking at governance and funding arrangements in time for the next sub group meeting.**
17. Members then discussed Planning Service functions transferring to local government. The Agency currently operates from six Divisional Planning Offices which align with groupings of council areas. The divisions receive central support in terms of IT, Personnel and Finance functions. Members were advised that whilst the regional offices deal with the majority of planning applications, a central specialist unit exists to deal with applications for example landfill sites, renewable energy projects, minerals, etc. Members believed it would be useful to consider whether all planning functions might be carried out on a shared service basis for the new councils or whether only specialist applications should be delivered on a shared basis. **It was agreed that the Planning Service representative would prepare a position paper for the next sub group meeting looking at these options.**
18. Members talked briefly about the issue of procurement, where the centre would be located if provided in house and whether this would mean better value for money for local government if provided on a shared services basis.
19. Members agreed that key work areas should also include ICT, Finance, and HR functions (primarily transactional issues).
20. It was pointed out that a consistent approach was essential in relation to managing the Environment Service functions transferring to local government due to the number of European Directives assigned to many of these EHS functions. It may be necessary to consider a mandatory model for implementation.

21. It was agreed that the Environmental Health function would not require primary legislation. The Chief Environmental Health Officer Group (CEHOG) representative advised that this professional group had forwarded a paper to the DoE Permanent Secretary outlining views on the implementation of effective environmental health linkages between councils. **He agreed to develop this paper further with a view to circulating it to sub group members.**
22. The Chair again emphasised the need to focus on those areas which require primary legislation and whilst local roads and building control were important issues they could be deferred until a later date.
23. The Chair stated that following the Secretary's forthcoming meeting with the Chairs of the subgroups, a work programme for the shared services would be developed.

Meetings Schedule

24. Dates have been arranged for further sub group meetings as follows:

Tuesday 30 May at 9.30am
Monday 5 June at 9.30am
Monday 19 June at 9.30am
Thursday 29 June at 9.30am

Venues will be confirmed at a later date.