

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE

SHARED SERVICES SUB GROUP

Minute of meeting on 5 June 2006
at Antrim Civic Centre

Attendees:

Ian Maye – Chair
Morris Crum – Larne Borough Council
John Quinn – ARC 21
Lorna Parsons – LGSC
Ellen Cavanagh – Derry City Council
Eamon Molloy – NWRCBG
Robert White – Northern Group Building Control
Moira McVeigh – NILGA/North Down Borough Council
Alistair Morgan – CEHOG
Colin Reid – Consilium
Cllr Paul Bettison – IDEa
Colin Cluney – DFP (representing Bill McCluggage)
Rose Crozier – Belfast City Council
Cllr Tom Ekin – Belfast City Council
Ciaran Quigley – Belfast City Council
Bumper Graham – NIPSA/NIC ICTU
Richard Cummins - IDEa
Sharon Logue – Newtownabbey Borough Council
Roger Wilson – Armagh City & District Council
Colin McMinn – DHSSPS Fire & Rescue Service
Joan McCaffrey – Omagh District Council
Jim Wilkinson – DOE Planning Service
Canice O'Rourke – Down District Council
Cllr Jim Wells – Down District Council
Philip Irwin – Strategic Investment Board
Jim Stewart – DOE Local Government Division
Janis Purdy – DOE
Greg Magee - DOE

Apologies

Bob Stronge – NICVA
John McMillen – Central Procurement
David Gavaghan - SIB
Bill McCluggage - DFP
Cllr Lynn Fleming – Sinn Fein
Janet Cooper – DOE

Welcome & Introductions

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the sub group and provided an update on the position of the Taskforce as a whole. He advised that meetings had been arranged for the nine sub group chairs to provide progress updates to both the Political Panel and the Working Group in June. A further round of meetings would be held in July when chairs would present their final reports.

Minutes

2. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Draft Principles Paper

3. The Chair presented a principles paper stressing that this was a first draft only for consideration and comment by the group. Some discussion followed and a number of points made.
 - It was suggested that the first point on the paper appeared to conflict with point 10 and also with the idea that some services may be mandatory.
 - There was a lack of balance in terms of Section 75.
 - There was no reference to New Targeting Social Need, an exit strategy or negotiation with trade union side.
 - It was suggested that at point 9 the use of the word “robust” might be a little too strong.
 - It was agreed that the principles should be in the context of the overarching principle of empowering local government and the EU Charter.

The Chair advised that the Minister and the Political Panel had requested ‘options for consideration’ from each of the sub groups and it was therefore important that the group focused on the critical issues and what was achievable prior to April 2009. He added that he saw the main issues for consideration as:

- 1 the key transferring functions, eg Fire & Rescue, Planning and Roads.
- 2 The existing shared functions within Local Government, eg Environmental Health, Building Control, Legal Services and Waste and possible delivery models for these.
- 3 Clearing the way for the development of a shared service agenda for the future, within Local Government and with others. Areas to be considered in this grouping include Human Resources, ICT, Procurement and Accounting Services.

The Chair indicated the potential for cross sector regional shared services and sought views on the possible services, legislative, governance and financial implications.

Views were expressed that given the implementation issues for new authorities it would not be possible to consider such issues ahead of April 2009. Concern was also expressed on a centrally driven cross sector approach to shared services.

Fire & Rescue Service Paper

4. The representative from DHSSPS then spoke to his paper on the transfer of the NI Fire & Rescue Service to local government. He advised that the key issues for consideration were the funding and governance arrangements for the service. He then put forward two options for the transfer to local government:
 - The first with four elected members on the Fire & Rescue Service Board representing the seven new councils; and
 - A second option with the establishment of a new body corporate representative of the new councils.

It was suggested that a third option would be to have each council represented, holding a majority on the Board, together with a number of independents. Some discussion followed on this and it was agreed that this was the favoured option of the group. It was also agreed that further clarification was required on the issue of funding. **Action Colin McMinn**

Planning Service Paper

5. The representative from the Planning Service next spoke to his paper on the potential for planning to be carried out as a shared service. Two options for shared service delivery were presented.
 - all council planning functions delivered by a single shared service rather than each council managing its own planning unit; and
 - only specific planning functions would be delivered via a shared service option, with the remainder being delivered by individual councils.

There was consensus within the group that planning functions should continue to be provided on a council basis but that the processing of specialist applications and provision of specialist advice eg. minerals, waste, landscape etc could be provided on a shared basis.

An issue was raised over the governance of councils processing planning applications and the need for appropriate checks and balances. Whilst it

was acknowledged that this was not a matter for the sub-group to consider, it was agreed that Government should give this issue the most careful consideration. **Action Jim Wilkinson**

Environmental Health Services Paper

6. The representative from the Chief Environmental Health Officers Group (CEHOG) next addressed the group.. CEHOG's recommendation is for the establishment of a small team of environmental health practitioners to provide an interface across local government, to advise and assist in the development of policy and strategy, to cut-across departmental boundaries and provide support and liaison between central and local government.

It was agreed that this smaller unit proposal would be further explored in the context of implementing the Review, but that legislation would not be required to do so. The consensus view of the sub-group was that environmental health should be delivered from individual councils, in line with the paper's recommendation.

Building Control Paper

7. The Building Control representative next spoke to his paper and explained that the present Group system is unlikely to work in a seven council arrangement. Statutory provision would be required for Building Control to be delivered by each council. A statutory overarching body to coordinate and monitor service delivery would also be required. The consensus of the sub-group was that building control functions should be delivered from each individual council (which will require an amendment to statute), but that further thought should be given to whether an overarching committee structure was required to ensure consistency of approach across all councils and, if so, whether such a committee might be required by statute.

Future Meetings

8. The next meeting of the sub group will be the away day at the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick on 19 June.