

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE WORKING GROUP

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2006

#### AT BELFAST CITY HALL

#### ATTENDEES:

Stephen Peover	DOE Permanent Secretary (Chairperson)
David McCammick	Chief Executive of Antrim Borough Council
John Dempsey	Chief Executive of Ballymoney Borough Council
Robert Gilmore	Chief Executive of Banbridge District Council
Mick McGuckin	Chief Executive of Cookstown District Council
Tony McGurk	Chief Executive of Derry City Council
Peter McNaney	Chief Executive of Belfast City Council
John McGrillen	Vice-Chair of SOLACE
Adrian Kerr	Local Government Staff Commission (deputising for Brian Hanna)
Frank Bryan	Institute of Directors
Chris Gibson	CBI
Eleanor Gill	General Consumer Council (NI)
Frances McCandless	NICVA (deputising for Seamus McAleavey)
Tom Gillen	NIC/ICTU
Karen McCambley	NILGA (deputising for Heather Moorhead)
Jacqueline Irwin	NI Community relations Council
Cynthia Smith	DOE
Bill Howat	Former Chief Executive of Western Isles Council
Sandy Blair	Former Chief Executive of Newport CBC, and former Director of the Welsh Local Government Association
Anne O'Keeffe	Director of the Management Services Unit, Office for Local Authority Management, Dublin.
Ian Maye	DOE
Grace McGuinness	DOE
Marie Finnegan	DOE
Debbie Donnelly	RPA
Sinead Grimes	Belfast City Council
Greg Magee	DOE

Apologies: Derek Osborn, Sustainable Development Commission  
Heather Moorhead, NILGA  
Seamus McAleavey, NICVA  
Brian Hanna, LG Staff Commission  
John Ritchie, DOE

**Action**

**Welcome and Apologies**

## Action

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and read the list of apologies.  
**Minutes of last meeting**

2. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed

## Matters Arising

3. Terms of Reference  
The Chair asked members if there were any further comments on the content of the Terms of Reference (ToR) which were still in draft form. It was suggested that there should be reference to efficiency, effectiveness and value for money together with the modernisation of services. The Chair urged members to forward any further comments to Greg Magee.

## Members

4. Public Service Commission  
The Chair advised the group that his meeting with the Public Service Commission on 9 May 2006 had been both positive and constructive. He further advised that the Department would continue to engage with the PSC and receive feedback on its meetings with other public sector and local government bodies.

5. IDeA  
The Chair was asked if the contract between the Department and the IDeA could be shared with the Working Group, provided it was not a Commercial in Confidence document.

DOE

6. Protocol Paper  
The meeting was advised that a paper had been drafted to clarify the role of elected members on the Taskforce. This will be shared with NILGA before being tabled at the next meeting. It was suggested that the Department should consider the experience that Chief Executives could offer on working with elected members.

DOE

7. Communication  
The Chair advised members that the local government website was now up and running and included membership lists, draft terms of reference, agreed minutes and details of forthcoming meetings for the Political Panel, Working Group and the Sub Groups. He added that the website would be continuously updated during the process. The Chair stated that he would write to Chief Executives to ensure they were aware of the existence of the website and that it was brought to the attention of staff. Members were advised that this was a first step only and a group would be established to look at the development of a fuller communications strategy which would identify what the key messages were, who they should be communicated to and how. It was suggested that a monthly bulletin should be produced or a frequently

DOE

DOE

asked questions page added to the website.

### **Update**

8. Boundaries Legislation  
The Chair advised the meeting that the Local Government (Boundaries) (NI) Order 2006 has now been made.
9. Boundaries Commissioner  
The Boundaries Commissioner will take up post on 1 June 2006 and will be tasked with drawing up the boundaries for the new councils.
10. Transfer of Functions  
The Chair advised members that DOE was now responsible for coordinating the transfer of functions legislation and had begun engaging with departments on moving the process forward. He stated that some Departments had already begun to consider the issues and prepare for the way ahead. It was pointed out that there was concern over some of the functions to be transferred.

### **Sub Groups**

11. The Chair advised the meeting that there had been political dissatisfaction with the process. Elected members felt they were outnumbered within the sub groups and there were concerns that some work had begun before parties had nominated to the groups. These concerns were allayed however following meetings between the new Minister and the DUP and SDLP.
12. The Chair went on to inform the meeting that he had held a meeting of all the sub group chairs. All sub groups, except one, had met at least once and some had organised internal working groups, away days and study visits with the involvement of elected members. The Governance sub group had organised separate meetings with the political representatives but an all-party meeting and a full meeting of the group were now being arranged.
13. It was pointed out that it was not only politicians who felt outnumbered in the sub groups and there was some concern over the size of these groups. The Chair stressed that there was no power of veto within the groups. Their role is to identify and discuss the main issues within their areas and provide recommendations to the Working Group and Political Panel. He added that the ultimate decision making power lay with the Minister.
14. Council Chief Executives advised that their elected members had

reported back, following their meeting with the Minister, and the timetable was more flexible than first believed and that changes to the 7-council model were still possible. The Chair advised that the timetable had been set in order to meet the date for the reorganisation of the new councils, 1 April 2009. He advised that the deadline for sub group proposals remained 30 June 2006 but explained that there would be continuing interaction with the groups after this date to seek clarification and make amendments to proposals prior to instructions being sent to the Office of the Legislative Council. The Chair further advised that the 7-council model was agreed although if the Assembly reconvened then it could move to reconsider this.

15. The Chair proposed that the Working Group meet with the sub group chairs in June to consider their emerging findings and the way ahead. A further meeting will be arranged at the beginning of July to consider the final proposals. It was suggested that chairs should provide short update papers in advance of the meetings for consideration by members. Some discussion followed on the roles of the sub groups, the Working Group and the Political Panel. The Chair advised that the Taskforce was a collective with the Working Group and Political Panel providing advice to the Minister who had the final decision making role.

#### **Date for Next Meeting**

The next meetings will be on Thursday 8 June 2006 and Tuesday 4 July 2006 at the Hilton Hotel in Templepatrick.