

## **Key Outcomes from Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) 3 July 2009**

### **Welcome to Minister Poots**

- Environment Minister Edwin Poots was welcomed by all members of the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) as the new Chair of the Board.
- The Minister stated that he was looking forward to working closely with all members to take forward the challenging Local Government Reform Programme.
- Thanks were noted for former Environment Minister Sammy Wilson for all his work on local government reform.

### **Minutes of Meetings**

- Minutes from the previous SLB meeting on 22 May 2009 were approved. The minutes are now available on the Local Government section of the DOE website on [www.doeni.gov.uk](http://www.doeni.gov.uk) and the NILGA website [www.nilga.org](http://www.nilga.org).

### **Planning Reform**

- The Minister informed members that the outstanding issues in relation to the draft consultation paper were resolved earlier this week and the Executive has cleared the planning reform consultation paper.
- Minister Poots advised of his intention to issue the consultation paper for a 12-week period of public consultation during the following week.
- This consultation paper was subsequently launched on 6 July 2009 and is available to view at: [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/news/news\\_consultation/news-consultation-reform-060709.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/news/news_consultation/news-consultation-reform-060709.htm).

### **Programme Management**

- SLB members were advised that PA Consulting has been appointed on 23 June 2009 in the role of Strategic Adviser to aid the development, delivery and implementation of a new programme management system and that they had already started work on the project.

### **Executive Sub Committee**

- It was confirmed that the first meeting of the Executive Sub Committee will take place on the 20 July 2009.
- It was noted that issues on the agenda will include the integration of work between councils and departments on Community Planning; transfer of NICS staff to Local Government; implementation funding; and the finalisation of arrangements for transferring functions.

### **Review of Local Government Reform Organisational Structures**

- It was reported that there has been good progress on the Review.
- Focus groups have already been held with each of the three PDPs, SOLACE and representatives of Transition Committees.
- An issues paper is currently being prepared on the views expressed on the existing organisational arrangements and what needs to be done to meet the changes and challenges over the next two years.
- The Joint Secretariat advised that the next step will be to conduct a series of interviews with the political parties, NILGA and Transferring Function Departments. SLB interviews are scheduled for 27-30 July and members were encouraged to participate due to the tight timescale for the Review.
- NILGA confirmed that they have written to the political parties who have agreed to postpone the handing over of the chairmanships of the three Panels until after the review.
- SLB was informed that the draft report is on course to be delivered by the next SLB meeting on 14 August.

### **Capital Expenditure and Voluntary Transition Committees**

- It was agreed that the Department should clarify that while approval is not necessary, there should be sharing of information for loan sanctions amongst voluntary Transition Committees as part of their role in considering capital programme convergence.
- It was confirmed that a letter from the Department will be issued during the following week.

### **Response from Minister Goggins on Co-option**

- Members discussed Minister Goggins' previous commitment to giving further consideration to amending the co-option scheme following the outcome of the consultation on severance of elected members.
- It was noted that the consultation is complete and the Department is following up on this issue with Minister Goggins.
- NILGA confirmed their intention to write to Minister Goggins on this matter.

### **Policy Development Panel (PDP A) - Governance, Central/Local Relations and Community Planning Update**

- Panel A reported that it is reviewing its work programme to identify those areas where further work is required and the key priorities and tasks.
- A paper was presented on the Panel's proposals in relation to a programme of activities to inform and support the statutory introduction of Community Planning in 2011. This highlighted that:
  - the establishment of Statutory Transition Committees will provide the opportunity to rethink how work is taken forward to prepare councils for the introduction of council-led Community Planning in 2011;
  - this provides an opportunity to build on existing working partnerships;
  - there is a need to link initiatives in Departments that have a local focus to Community Planning;
  - there is a requirement for engagement with organisations at a regional level; and
  - there is a need to identify resources to support the proposed programme.
- Planning Service committed to working with one or two Transition Committees, in advance of 2011, on preparatory work for the new local development plans.

### **Policy Development Panel B (PDP B) - Service Delivery**

- Panel B reported that their current focus is on the development of proposals for a procurement strategy; finalisation of customer service strategy policy proposals; and the development of guidance to support the Service Delivery and Performance Improvement Framework.
- It was confirmed that the IS Strategy has been remitted to the NILGA e-Government Working Group to drive its implementation and make recommendations to the Panel.

### **Policy Development Panel C (PDP C) - Structural Reform Issues**

#### **Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery**

- PwC presented its draft Phase 1 report to SLB and confirmed that views had been sought from the five main political parties and SOLACE through Policy Development Panel C.
- The Report contains a number of key recommendations including a full economic appraisal on a range of options for local government service delivery; the requirement for clear direction for Transition Committees; and the need for decisions on the design of appropriate regional structures for local government.
- Panel C presented its views on the PwC report and iterated that they recognised the benefits this approach would have for the citizen and the importance of having strong political leadership to take this forward.
- The Panel expressed their support for a reconstituted NILGA to represent the 11 new councils.
- There was support from members of SLB for shared services to be explored as part of Phase 2 of the consultancy assignment to avoid any further reorganisation subsequent to 2011.
- PwC reassured members that the economic appraisal (Phase 2) will include a full business case with timescales, existing capacity and knowledge base within government identified. This is to be fully supported by an implementation plan that will identify key risks and quantify resources, time and money required.
- It was agreed by SLB members that Trade Unions should be involved in ongoing work.
- The full support of stakeholders in providing additional information was welcomed.
- SLB agreed the paper to allow work on the economic appraisal of options to start immediately.

#### **Capacity Building Report**

- Panel C confirmed that they have signed off the final recommendations from the Capacity Building Working Group.
- The Panel stated that training needed to start immediately.
- Panel C recommended that additional resources need to be secured by the Department, in addition to that already allocated to Transition Committees. The Panel suggested that this cost was estimated to be around £1.5 million and that these costs should feed into the PwC Phase 2 report.
- The Panel recommended that this Programme should be overseen jointly between the Local Government Training Group and NILGA.

- SLB members clarified that capacity building must be focussed on value for money training and that a balanced approach was required in order to support both members and officers in the change process.
- SLB members agreed the paper.

### **Finance and Estates Implementation**

- Panel C made a number of recommendations through the second Implementation paper on Finance and Estate policy issues.
- These included further work in relation to the Rate Support Grant modelling; a consistent approach to data collection to aid the 11 new councils; and the independent validation of funds being reassigned on functions transferring.
- Panel C advised that the Finance and Estates Working Group is continuing to work on a number of key issues including striking of the rates for the new councils; settling of accounts for the old councils; and options for transferring funding to district councils. Panel C confirmed that it will receive the Group's report by late summer.
- SLB members agreed that the recommendations in the paper could be passed to the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) for implementation.

### **Appointments of Senior Staff to New Councils**

- Panel C presented a paper to SLB members to ask if consideration has been given to issuing regulations on employing the senior staff team for the new councils.
- The Panel relayed that in England and Wales consistency across the councils was achieved through legislation.
- The Minister agreed that further consideration is required on this issue of regulations.
- It was decided that the matter should be remitted to the Local Government Reform Joint Forum to make recommendations on the way forward.

### **Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) and Transition Committee Update**

- An update was provided on the last RTCG meeting and the progress of Transition Committees.
- Key outcomes included arrangements for the establishment of the Local Government Reform Joint Forum to facilitate consultation and negotiation on Human Resource issues; and the establishment of a Finance and Estates Implementation Group.
- The "Making Transition Work" seminar on 6 July 2009 was also discussed. As the first in a series of seminars hosted by the Joint Secretariat in conjunction with SOLACE, this was designed to provide guidance and support during the transition process. Approximately 160 delegates were registered.

### **Communications Update Paper**

- It was relayed that there was a helpful first meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications Group.
- Priorities were established for future meetings including creating a communication strategy template to provide guidance for Transition Committees.
- It was highlighted that the Group had expressed concern about resource issues and branding and further work needs to be carried out to clarify this situation for Group members.

### **Local Government Reform Implementation Framework**

- It was highlighted that as information in this document is continuously evolving that updates should be provided at each SLB meeting.
- The appointment of PA Consulting was welcomed as this should help to develop and deliver an enhanced Programme Management System by September to support effective implementation.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The next SLB meeting will be held on 14 August 2009 at 10am.

**Please note:** The information above may be subject to change. This is due to the quick turnaround of information in order to provide a summary as soon as possible after each meeting. The formal minutes will represent the information in finalised format.

### **Joint Secretariat**