

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2007

### GOODWOOD HOUSE, BELFAST

<b>Members:</b>	Environment Minister Ald Arnold Hatch Cllr Mervyn Storey, MLA Cllr Joanne Bunting Cllr Alex Maskey MLA Cllr John O’Kane Cllr Tony Hill Cllr Sean Begley Peter McNaney Cllr Dermot Curran Ald Sam Gardiner, MLA Cllr John Matthews Ashley Boreland Paul Simpson	Chair NILGA President – Vice Chair DUP DUP NILGA Sinn Fein SDLP Alliance NILGA Sinn Fein NILGA LG Adviser (RPA Working Group) SDLP NILGA UUP Alliance LG Adviser (Ards BC) DOE
<b>Apologies:</b>	John McGrillen	LG Adviser (SoLACE)
<b>Joint Secretariat:</b>	Ian Maye Heather Moorhead John McAreavey	DOE Joint Secretary NILGA Joint Secretary DOE
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Andrew Crawford Grace McGuinness John Price Alan Hanna Andrea Reid Sean Tohill	Special Adviser to the Minister DOE DOE NILGA NILGA DOE

### Actions

#### 1 Welcome and Minutes of Last Meeting

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished everyone a Happy New Year.

1.2 Apologies were noted from John McGrillen.

1.3 A member felt that some comments that he had made about matters outstanding at the end of the previous meeting had not been included in the minutes.

**Joint Secretariat to amend the minutes to include comments raised at last meeting.**

1.4 Subject to the above changes the minutes were agreed.

## **2 Matters arising**

2.1 The Chair asked members to raise any matters that they wished to discuss.

2.2.1 The Vice-Chair wished everyone a Happy New Year and asked about progress on paragraph 6.1.7 of the minutes, specifically on an economic analysis of Roads costs.

2.2.2 The DOE Joint-Secretary noted that the Department has been working closely with Roads Service and all Departments on costing and that work has begun on a Strategic Outline Business Case which will be finalised after the Executive have made their decision, as the Department is not proposing to do any detailed work on economic appraisal prior to the Executive decision. He further noted that the Strategic Outline Business Case would concentrate on how to implement the decisions of the Assembly.

2.3 The Vice-Chair indicated that there were no other matters arising beyond those on the agenda.

2.4 The Chair noted that she had agreed at the last meeting to discuss the issues surrounding the composition of the board with officials and to announce a decision on how to proceed at this meeting. The Chair further noted that she had discussed the matter with officials and there was a feeling that the representation on the board should be from NILGA's top team - the Office Bearers, along with a member from each party. The Chair felt, however, that she did not want to prescribe this approach and that there was room to compromise. The Chair wanted to know what the parties wanted, in terms of how flexible they wanted the membership to be. With this in mind the Chair suggested that the joint secretariat should circulate a proposal paper to members and that members should let her know their views prior to the next meeting.

**Joint secretariat to circulate a proposal paper to members, so they can let the Chair know their views before the next meeting.**

### **3 Review of Local Government RPA Decisions – Progress Report – *DOE Paper SLB 23/2008***

3.1.1 The Chair noted that she had held a series of bi-lateral meetings with Ministerial colleagues over the last six weeks to discuss the functions that would transfer as part of the RPA and that the engagements had been very helpful.

3.1.2 The Chair praised NILGA, SoLACE NI, Belfast City and the other councils for the well thought out proposals that they had presented at the last meeting and for their response to the stakeholder engagement process and noted that she had used the material they provided in her bilateral meetings with colleagues.

- 3.1.3 A DOE member noted that fifty-six substantive responses had been received as part of the stakeholder engagement process and that this was an indication of how important stakeholders feel that this process is.
- 3.1.4 The Chair noted that her discussions with colleagues had focused on local roads functions, libraries and the youth service and that although the feedback was not as positive as she had hoped, that she had not given up on the idea that those functions would transfer.
- 3.1.5 The Chair recognised that Ministers want to keep functions within their Departments whereas local government want to deliver services more effectively, and efficiently.
- 3.2.1 The Chair noted that the Executive is very close to a decision on the number of councils and that the Department is working on putting forward the final report on the review.
- 3.3.1 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that NILGA had held productive engagements with Ministers Robinson, Dodds, and Ritchie.
- 3.3.2 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that with regard to Roads issues Minister Robinson had acknowledged the need for a greater accountability role at local level.
- 3.3.3 The Chair noted that there is not as much land bank as is commonly thought.

- 3.3.4 The NILGA Joint Secretary agreed this point. She further noted that the meeting with the Minister for Social Development had been useful in considering the issues of a joint and creative approach to the provision of social housing and the transfer of housing functions. The Minister stated she would welcome a more joined up approach between NILGA and the Housing Council in relation to this issue. She also said she would be happy to consider early projects to support a smooth transition of the Regeneration Function.
- 3.3.5 The Vice-Chair noted that it is important for local government to meet with all the relevant Ministers by mid-January but that some Ministers were not agreeing to meeting dates within this timescale.
- 3.3.6 The Chair suggested that she write to Ministers personally encouraging them to engage with NILGA as soon as possible. **Chair to write to her Ministerial colleagues and encourage them to meet with NILGA**
- 3.3.7 A member noted that, at the meeting with Minister Dodds, NILGA were pleased to learn that the Department has a clear understanding of the variety of issues requiring attention in the development of a role for councils within the Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy.
- 3.3.8 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that at the meeting with Minister Poots an important issue was raised concerning the principles that underlie the Transfer of Functions. For example, significant administration costs relating to the transfer of the Community Festivals Fund will not be reallocated to councils but rather retained by DCAL. She noted that there were concerns that when functions transfer to local government, local government will be disadvantaged.

The technical services staff that currently performs the function will not transfer to local government. There are concerns that skilled Civil Servants will be pulled into the core and local government will be left in control of a function, without skilled technical services people and insufficient funds to train their own staff. The NILGA Joint Secretary emphasised that local government is keen for an equitable transfer of functions and requested the development of a set of underlying principles to guide the transfer process.

3.4.1 A member raised the issue of the development of area plans and local area plans. He felt that the thinking on this wasn't clear and that the current plans added an additional tier that wasn't required.

3.4.2 The Chair noted that there was some confusion on this issue and that the intended local area plans would be 85% the same as the existing area plans. She noted that the intention was for the local area plans to be done on the basis of council clusters, although this will depend on the Executive's final decision on council numbers. If the decision is for 15 councils then it should be done on the basis of council clusters. If the decision is for 11 councils then it may be that each council area produces its own plan.

#### **4 Modernising Agenda – Subgroup Report – *Joint Secretariat Paper – SLB 24/2007***

4.1.1 The Chair invited the Chairs of the Modernisation Sub-Groups to report on their initial meetings.

4.1.2 The Chairs nominated the secretaries from the sub-groups to present an update on progress.

#### **Sub-Group A**

- 4.2.1 A NILGA officer provided an overview of the sub-groups and an update on Strand A. A summary is provided below.
- 4.2.2 The two Modernisation Sub-Groups were set up in September 2007 and each has held 2-3 meetings and an Awareness and Development Event. The projects and work areas for both are in development and the strategic approach for each group is being developed.
- 4.2.3 The role for the SLB was defined as being to:
- Agree a vision for local government
  - Drive the local government modernisation and RPA implementation programme
  - Agree the remit, functions, priorities and composition of SLB Sub-Groups
  - Approve the programme of work for sub-groups
  - Advise the Minister on key decisions relating to the programme.
- 4.2.4 The NILGA spokesperson gave an overview of the composition of the sub-groups and outlined their remit.
- 4.2.5 The SLB Sub-Groups are designed to take a strategic view of the process; to maximise the development of co-operative & collaborative ventures across groups of councils; external consultancy support for some areas; and SLB Sub-Group proposals provide detail to support bids for central government funds.

#### Legislative Framework & Capacity Building

- 4.2.6 The major priorities identified by the Strand A Group are
- Assessment of current capacity – it was decided that it is necessary to carry out a base line assessment exercise to audit the current capacity within Local Councils.

- Development of a communication strategy – The Director of Communication and Engagement, Máire Killoran, has commenced work with NILGA and is already working on this issue with DOE Officials.
- Elected Members Development Programme – The group has received presentations from John Adams, Employer’s Secretary NIJC, on elected members’ charter as a frame work to develop a capacity building programme.
- Developing a Customer Service Strategy – Dr. Andrea Reid, NILGA, has presented early ideas for the development of a strategy for Local Government for both groups.
- Change Management/Transition Strategy and Human Resource Strategy – Work is due to commence on these two strategies after the decisions have been announced in early February.

4.3.1 A member raised the issue of training programmes for elected members and whether there would be a pick list for elective training.

4.3.2 The NILGA spokesperson assured the member that work was being done to identify a core list of training which would be required for all elected members, with Corporate Governance and Customer Service at the top of the list. This will be supplemented with a pick list for elective training.

4.3.3 A member raised a concern about the quantity of work being taken on by the two sub-groups, if they intend to develop the business cases for five Policy Development Panels (PDPs).

4.3.4 The NILGA spokesperson confirmed that the business cases will be included in the work of the two sub-groups and that there is a strategy on how to move forward.

- 4.4.1 A member noted that, as a member of sub-group A, he felt that it was a vicious circle. The group is trying to move forward but without PDPs they cannot. He noted that Governance, deciding on the use of cabinet or committee systems, was picked by the group as the most important issue.
- 4.4.2 The NILGA spokesperson noted that issues relating to new Governance arrangements within councils could not be fully addressed until the number of new councils has been finalised.
- 4.4.3 A member complimented the work done by Group A and recognised that the use of resources is a fundamental part of Capacity Building and should be 'signposted'. He further noted the four pillars of the process would be Governance; Performance Management; Use of Resources; and Customer Focus.

The secretary for Sub-Group B provided an overview of progress within Sub-Group B. A summary is provided below.

#### **Sub-Group B**

- 4.5.1 The aim of Sub-Group B is to improve the way in which councils work; to deliver business-related services which are standardised, simple and provide value for money; and to enable resources to be released to improve front-line service delivery.
- 4.5.2 Council spending amounts to £450 million per year. It should be possible to save 5 -10% per year through collaborative procurement.
- 4.5.3 There is general agreement that collaborative working is the way to go and that we must work to take the stigma out of shared services.
- 4.5.4 The Key Work priorities of Strand B are: NI Direct; Shared Service; Procurement/Finance; Close connection with NILGA eGovernment Working Group on IS Strategy, Mobile working

Pilots and Local Citizen View; Local Authority Customer Relationship Management; and Network Infrastructure.

- 4.5.5 The secretary noted that the group needs to discuss how they are getting the message across. The process can be time-consuming and difficult because the best communication is done face to face.
- 4.5.6 The common themes across both sub-groups are Customer/Citizen Focus; Governance and Transition arrangements; Communication and Engagement; and Capacity Building.
- 4.5.7 The secretary suggested that the issues surrounding Consultation and Engagement were for consideration by the board. A programme is required to build engagement and he proposed a half-day workshop with Chief Executives to examine how to engage councils further.
- 4.5.8 A member noted that it is difficult for individual councillors, given the raft of issues that they face, to fully understand the issues surrounding modernisation. He further noted that it is not fair on Chief Executives to ask them to disseminate the constant stream of information. He suggested that it is up to the board to set out the information in a very simple way – i.e. define a structure and identify the issues.

- 4.5.9 A member supported this view but clarified that what is delivered should be general information suitable for everyone and that they wouldn't need to know the structure. The member was keen that the group address the needs of the staff. She noted that there was a tacit acknowledgement that the lower staffing levels would be least affected. Chief Executives must address rumours early and provide proper information to council staff at all levels.
- 4.5.10 The Chair noted that the SLB will have a role but it needs to make time to look at itself and what it can do.
- 4.5.11 A member noted that NILGA's Communications Director is now in place and there could be a role for her to put something together for councils.
- 4.5.12 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that no one method will tick all the boxes. At present every elected member gets an update. The new Communications Director is putting together a Communication Strategy. A meeting with the Department has been planned to outline the communications strategy with the Department.
- 4.5.13 A member noted that the message needs to be clear because people in councils are already talking and the brutal truths must be told. She also noted that any communications should be short, simple and newsy.
- 4.5.14 A member noted that she is concerned about the level of the briefings from the sub-groups. She noted that the board needs enough information to make an informed decision and she feels that a five minute update at the SLB meeting is not sufficient.

- 4.6.1 The Vice-Chair noted that it might reassure staff fears if they had an outline of the principles to be employed in staff changes.
- 4.6.2 A DOE member noted that DHSSPS has been through a similar process in reducing 18 Health Trusts to 5. He further noted that a set of Public Service Commission (PSC) guiding principles, of which two or three are key in giving reassurance to staff members. He suggested that any communications to staff as part of the RPA should be heavily loaded with reassuring messages from the PSC guiding principles. He suggested that a presentation on the Key Guiding Principles should be made at the next meeting. **Joint Secretariat to arrange for a presentation on the Key Guiding Principles**
- 4.6.3 A member suggested that John Adams should attend the next meeting of the SLB and help in a discussion of the Guiding Principles. **John Adams to be invited to the next meeting of the SLB**
- 4.6.4 A member suggested that the board should collectively consider what questions are likely to be asked following the planned announcements in February. He suggested that representatives from the board should speak to the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) and together they should begin work on preparing answers for likely questions. They should draw up broad principles to answer questions and offer reassurance to staff and members of the public.

- 4.6.5 The Chair agreed with this and suggested that it should be done for the next meeting. **Deputy Secretary (DOE) to speak to LGSC and try to prepare something for next meeting**

#### Policy Development Panels (PDPs)

- 4.7 A member noted that the nine working groups that were established by the taskforce early on in the review process had been very pressured to deal with the same issues that 5 PDPs will be asked to do. **Joint Secretariat to prepare a paper on PDPs for next meeting, subject to decisions being made**
- 4.8.1 The DOE Joint Secretary noted that a number of discussions had been held concerning the transition and it had been recognised that, where there was cross-party agreement under the previous administration, there was no reason to deviate from those decisions. He further noted that there will be real challenges ahead in the transition from sub-groups to PDPs following the final decisions on the review; in how they are supported by NILGA and the Department; and in how they engage with task and finish groups. He also noted that there will be a third tier to the structure, with groups of councils coming together to develop their thinking.
- 4.8.2 The Vice-Chair noted that this kind of decision-making among

councils will take time and money and asked how they will access funding.

4.8.3 The DOE Joint Secretary explained that the thinking on this is at an early stage. It is intended to establish a substantial 'challenge fund', along the lines of that established by the Department of Communities and Local Government and in Scotland, married to the key priorities to ensure that the money is used in the most intelligent way.

4.9 A DOE member gave a summary of the current timetable - the decisions are due at the end of the month. Once the final decisions are known the Strategic Business Case for Implementation can be finalised. Only then will the direct impact on staff be clear. He noted that we are at the point of cost and savings yet. He further noted that we can point to the PSC guiding principles to reassure staff.

4.10 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that we need to market this as a positive opportunity, such as emphasising the career opportunities, and that now is the time to deal with things that have been problems for years.

4.11 A member noted that there is a need to focus in the communication on the improvements in the level of service for citizens.

4.12 A member noted that there were issues around cost and that the priority must be to protect the rate payer from costs going through the roof.

## **5 NILGA Business Case**

5.1.1 The Chair noted that the formal letter of offer of funding for NILGA had issued.

5.1.2 The NILGA Joint Secretary noted that NILGA are working to address issues. She noted that they are very pleased with the field of candidates that have applied for positions and that the process is moving forward.

5.1.3 The Chair noted that it would be appropriate to issue a Press Release about the offer of funding. **DOE Joint Secretary to issue Press Release on NILGA funding offer**

**6 Date of next meeting**

6.1 The Chair informed members that the next meeting has been scheduled for 20 February 2008, and noted that meetings had been scheduled through to August. She asked members if they were happy with the current venue and for the next meeting to be held in the same location. **Joint Secretariat to notify members of the date and venue of next meeting**

Members were content.

**7 Any Other Business**

Communications Strategy

7.1.1 The Chair asked the DOE Joint Secretary to provide an outline of where we stand in relation to the Communications Strategy.

7.1.2 The DOE Joint Secretary noted that NILGA and the Department have both been working on a Communication Strategy. LGPD are finalising a draft paper and will be discussing the paper with NILGA on 10 January 2008, with a view to the paper being agreed between the SLB and the Chair, prior to consultation with the wider stakeholder group in the local government sector.