

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 AUGUST 2007

STORMONT HOTEL BELFAST

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

Actions

1 Welcome and Minutes of Last Meeting

- 1.1 In the absence of the Minister the Vice Chair agreed to lead the meeting. The Chair welcomed everyone and apologies were noted from the Minister, Councillor Mervyn Storey, and John McGrillen.

- 1.2 A member raised an issue on the use of Civil Service acronyms in the minutes. It was agreed that these should be changed to long format.

**Joint Secretariat
to amend
minutes of the
last meeting**

Subject to this amendment the Minutes were agreed.

2 Matters arising

- 2.1 Location of Public Sector Jobs - A member asked for an update on the development of Guiding Principles on the Location of Public Sector Jobs. The member also asked for an update on the progress of the Workplace 2010 project as this could create long term financial commitments for Councils. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that the 'Guiding Principles on the location of Public Sector Jobs', developed by DFP was discussed at the Executive meeting on 19 July but that it had been agreed that a further paper would be produced in the autumn.

**Update on both
issues to be
provided to
members at a
subsequent
meeting**

In connection with location issues a DOE representative alerted members to the recently published (June 2007) 2006/7 Report by the Chief Local Government Auditor and in particular the advice in relation to the treatment of bids for new builds in advance of restructuring (para 49 refers).

- 2.2.1 Elected representatives on Public Bodies - Referring to the discussions at the last meeting concerning the position of elected representatives on public bodies a member referred to receipt of a letter from the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the issue. This pointed to appointments being made on the merit principle, in accordance with the guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments but that the Executive would give further consideration to this issue. The member expressed concern that this approach would impact on the democratisation of such bodies and further

indicated that the member's party would want to have an input into any elected members being selected for appointment.

2.2.2 A number of other members supported this position and indicated that in their view positions should be reserved for elected representatives to serve on the boards of public bodies. The DOE Joint Secretary confirmed that after the last meeting the Minister had written to her Executive colleagues expressing local government's views on the matter and had followed this up in subsequent discussions. The NILGA Joint Secretary indicated that the sector needs to engage further with their parties to ensure that the issue is raised in the Executive and Assembly.

2.3.1 Central Joint Forum - A member asked for an update on the current status of the Central Joint Forum and on how local government representation would be handled in future. A DOE representative advised that the paper on the Public Service Commission had not been put to the Executive at its meeting on 19 July and that until the matter was considered by the Executive both bodies would continue to operate. He further indicated that at this stage it would fall to the DOE Permanent Secretary to bring forward issues to the CJF in relation to local government.

2.3.2 A member highlighted that local government is different to the other sectors affected by the RPA as each of the 26 Councils are individual employers and the National Joint Council provides the mechanism for discussing HR related issues with the Trade Unions. The member indicated that the Trade Unions are claiming that the Central Joint Forum is a negotiating forum, but that neither the Minister nor the DOE can speak on behalf of the sector.

2.3.3 A DOE representative confirmed that the role of the Central Joint Forum is to provide a forum for discussion on staffing issues associated with the outworking of the RPA rather than represent a negotiating forum, and that Trade Unions should be using existing machinery for any negotiations. It was agreed that the Terms of Reference would be circulated to members.

Terms of Reference for the CJF to be provided for members

2.4 NI-Direct - A member requested an update on the proposal to include local government services in the single direct phone-number for central government services. A DOE representative advised that the matter will be discussed with the NILGA e-Government Group on 16 August. It was acknowledged that the matter can be pursued further in the Strand B Modernisation Sub-group.

2.5 Strategic Leadership Board ToR - The Chair indicated that in discussions following the last meeting it was decided that agreement on the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for the Strategic Leadership Board should be delayed pending clarity on the overall programme. A number of members suggested that, as aspects had already been agreed, it would be appropriate to finalise ToR covering the period to the end of the review. It was agreed that revised draft ToR would be tabled at the next meeting.

Draft ToR for SLB to be tabled at next meeting.

3 Review of RPA decisions – Status Report

3.1 A representative from DOE spoke to the paper on the status report for the review of RPA decisions. The DOE representative informed members that progress on strand one of the process, the development of a vision for local government would be covered at agenda item 4. An update was provided on strands two and three, and proposals for

future work were outlined indicating how all three strands of the review would be brought together.

- 3.2 A member noted that although paper SLB 15/2007 refers to the community planning process and the complementary power of well-being, it is not included in paper SLB 17/2007 on local government modernisation. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that further development work on these issues would need to be guided by the Executive's decisions on community planning and the power of well-being, informed by the advice of the Ministerial sub-committee.
- 3.3 A member raised the issue of equalising the wealth base and the part it played in the decision making process on the number of councils. Concerns were raised about how rating wealth could be affected by changes in capital values and other factors such as industrial derating policy. A DOE representative acknowledged the limitations of considering wealth base at any point in time. The DOE representative suggested that the more critical issue was to determine how important equalisation of the wealth base should be in determining council numbers. The DOE Joint Secretary noted that this would be a matter the Ministerial sub-committee would want to consider very carefully.
- 3.4 A DOE representative noted that decisions on strand three, functions to transfer to local government, will also be a critical factor influencing decisions on the number of councils. A member noted that the scale of delivery will only become a meaningful factor if large transfers are to take place. The member noted that local government need a method of influencing the thinking of the Civil Service in relation to the decentralisation of delivery of services and that the main consideration for transferring functions should be whether they can be delivered better at a local level.

3.5 A member raised a concern that too much importance has been placed on the recommendations and proposals of the previous administration. The DOE Joint Secretary noted that although the review is based on the material available to the previous administration, the review is evidence based and will be taking in the views of all stakeholders. It will ultimately be a matter for the Executive to interpret the findings of the review and their conclusions could well be different to those of the previous administration.

3.6 A DOE representative noted that there were no substantive discussions on the transfer of functions at the Executive Sub-Committee meeting held on 13 August 2007, because one of the Ministers was unable to attend. A programme of work was formally agreed and the Sub-committee will meet again on 4 September (now changed to 11 September), 2 October and 30 October. The Sub-Committee are aiming to put their recommendations to the Executive in late November with the intention of publishing final decisions by Christmas.

3.7 A member expressed the opinion that up to this point civil servants have not been keen to transfer functions. The member noted that the transfer of functions forum is an inter-Departmental body, with no local government representation. The member expressed the view that some senior civil servants have shown a lack of understanding of how local government operates. The member was concerned that Departments are deciding what should transfer and that local government views are not represented and fed to the Executive.

3.8 The DOE Joint Secretary noted that the key players in the decision making process are Ministers. He agreed that the DOE would hold 4 regional meetings to facilitate local

**DOE to facilitate
4 regional
meetings to**

government involvement in all the strands of the review. He noted that this process has been designed so that local government as a sector can feed into it; individual councils, the SLB and NILGA all contribute to the process. A DOE representative noted that he chairs the Transfer of Functions Forum and he noted that its purpose is to coordinate the provision of information, not to lead the decision process.

**discuss
numbers and
functions**

4 Vision for Local Government in NI – SLB 16/2007

- 4.1 The Chair welcomed two consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers who presented members with an update on the process to develop a Vision for Local Government in NI.
- 4.2 A member indicated that NILGA has arranged a series of meetings across NI and asked how it would input into the development of the vision. The consultant advised that they will take written submissions and local government's case would be strengthened if the views were shared and supported by as much of the sector as possible.
- 4.3 A member expressed concerns about the process commenting that local government had input to a similar exercise under the previous administration and had been disappointed with the outcome. The consultant assured members that PwC are genuine in their desire to engage meaningfully and absorb inputs but that the capacity has to reside within local government to articulate its case.
- 4.4 Referring to research so far the consultant indicated that PwC had reflected on the position of local government in a number of jurisdictions and had drawn out the distinguishing features / characteristics to develop a draft summary paper. In

**Summary report
on desk**

response to a request from a member it was agreed that this would be circulated to members.

research to be shared with members.

4.5 A member noted that the SLB is included in the list of stakeholders and asked at what stage consultation would take place with members. After some debate about the roles the DOE Joint Secretary indicated that it would be helpful if members could attend the two main consultation events, and the events being planned in relation to the overall review process. He also indicated that future meetings of the SLB have been timetabled so that members have the best opportunity to feed in their views before each meeting of the Executive Sub-Committee.

4.6 The DOE Joint Secretary commented that members have a complex set of roles as individuals, representatives of their councils, representatives of their parties and representatives of the SLB. He indicated that inputs from local government at the stakeholder events will put the SLB in a better position to advise the Minister and by extension her Executive colleagues.

4.7 Referring to the invitation issued to Councils another member commented that members' attendance at the Strategic Leadership Board is not on behalf of their Councils, and it would not be appropriate for them to take up Council places at the stakeholder events. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that members would be invited in their own right and that the number of Council representatives would also be increased.

SLB members to be invited to the two main stakeholder events on 12 September and 16 October

4.8 In response a number of members asked if arrangements would be made to obtain the views of the Board. Following discussion, during which the DOE Joint Secretary outlined the critical stages in the process, it was agreed that the best

Input to review to be scheduled

opportunity would be at the 24 October SLB meeting when all the information from the review process is available. **for October meeting**

5 Modernising Agenda – SLB 17/2007

- 5.1 A DOE representative spoke on the Modernisation Agenda paper highlighting that the prioritisation of issues at paragraph 5 was purely indicative, and that the development of work programmes for the two stands would be a matter for the Sub-groups.
- 5.2 A member noted that governance arrangements for councils are listed under 'Other Priorities' but was not aware of any work being taken forward on this issue since the Taskforce Sub-group reported in July 2006. The member therefore considered that this should be regarded as a priority issue given its importance. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that the work carried out previously had been based around the decisions of the Direct Rule Administration and that this needs to be examined again as part of the modernisation programme that will flow from the current review. Decisions on governance principles to underpin any arrangements will be required from the Executive and the relative priority reflects the link to the review.
- 5.3 A member expressed concerns that the paper points to the two Sub-groups commissioning Task and Finish projects and pilots which should be taken forward by the proposed Policy Development Panels. The member sought an assurance that the Sub-groups would not replace the previously agreed arrangements. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that the interim arrangements are constructed to allow the Sub-groups to take forward some issues early but that the Minister is committed to the original PDP structure, with whatever

adjustments may be necessary to reflect the Executive's decisions.

- 5.4 A member noted that the third bullet point in paragraph 4 should read "Present costed options and recommendations on policy and implementation proposals to the Strategic Leadership Board for consideration." This was agreed.
- 5.5 Another member expressed concern in relation to the perceived slippage in the programme particularly as timescales are not included in the ToR. The DOE Joint Secretary confirmed that the Sub-groups are designed to run until December. At this stage it will be for the Board to advise the Minister on the replacement PDP structure, ensuring continuity in the work programmes and membership. It was agreed that the Sub-group timetable would be added to the ToR.

**Secretariat to
amend ToR.**

6 NILGA Business Case – SLB 18/2007

- 6.1 The NILGA Joint Secretary spoke to the paper, highlighting that the proposed restructuring is based on the IDeA Review and the need for NILGA to have the capacity to engage effectively with central government as the modernisation and reform programme progresses. The restructuring proposed at this stage represents an interim arrangement pending the outcome of the current review and clarity on the future programme.
- 6.2 The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that a draft of the NILGA business case had been shared with colleagues in DFP and the early indications are that they have no fundamental issues with the proposals but that further discussions would be required over the coming weeks. It was agreed that the

NILGA to submit

NILGA President would formally submit the Business Case for the Minister's consideration.

Business Case

7 Date of next meeting

7.1 The Chair noted that dates have been identified for the remaining SLB meetings, up to Christmas. The meetings are scheduled for 26 September at 10am, 24 October at 2pm and 5 December at 2pm.

Dates for future meetings of the SLB to be confirmed in writing

8 Any Other Business

8.1 The Chair provided a letter from NILGA, to be presented to the Minister concerning the delivery of European programmes requesting that she convene a meeting with her Ministerial colleagues to explore any potential for streamlining the complex matrix of delivery mechanisms for EU funded programmes.

8.2 The Chair raised the issue of a recent item in the press claiming that central government sources had indicated that certain decisions on the transfer of functions have already been made. Several members noted that local government were not happy that the press had indicated that the information came from a central government source.

8.3 The Minister's Special Advisor noted that the Minister was also very concerned about this story and assured members that at no stage did the press approach the Minister or the Department on this issue and that the story was unfounded. He further indicated that the Minister had issued a statement on 14 August stating clearly that no decisions have been made at this stage, and stressing that she is working in

partnership with local government, business and community and voluntary sectors to reach a consensus on the future shape of local government in Northern Ireland. He also noted that it would be beyond the Minister's remit to make any such decisions as they would fall to the Executive.

- 8.4 The DOE representative thanked the Vice Chair on behalf of the Minister for Chairing the meeting at such short notice.