

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 29<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2007

### STORMONT HOTEL, BELFAST

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

### Actions

#### 1 Welcome and Minutes of Last Meeting

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for agreeing to bring forward the meeting scheduled for 5 December. The Chair noted that the meeting had been arranged to facilitate full discussion on the review of the

Review of Public Administration.

1.2 Apologies were noted from Councillor Dermot Curran, Alderman Sam Gardiner, Councillor John Matthews and Peter McNaney.

1.3 Councillor Bunting raised an issue related to the number of political representatives on the SLB detailed in section 3.2.1 of the minutes. She stated that the way in which the minute was written reflected the opposite meaning from what had been intended. The Joint Secretariat agreed that confusion had arisen during correspondence. Members agreed to amend the minute to reflect the view expressed by the member at the time, which was that there should only be ten members on the SLB rather than eleven.

**Joint Secretariat to amend minutes to reflect true representation of members comments**

The minutes were subsequently agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

## **2 Matters Arising**

2.1.1 Further to the issue of political composition of the SLB, Councillor Bunting stated that her party's preferred approach was to have representation on the SLB relative to party strength, but had agreed to accept the IDeA recommendation of two members from each party. She outlined that her party did not accept that there should now be eleven members on the SLB despite the arrangements in the previous year.

2.1.2 The Chair invited members to come to an agreed solution and acknowledged that the issue needed to be resolved before the next meeting. She invited parties to outline their views on the

matter.

2.1.3 Members of the other parties supported the position that the President of NILGA should be an additional member of the SLB in an ex-officio role as the Vice-Chair, as had been agreed by the previous Minister.

2.1.4 The DUP member outlined that the precedent had occurred by default as it was Minister Cairns last meeting of the SLB. At the time she was asked to withdraw her objection and was assured that it would be dealt with at a later date. She highlighted that it was possible to be a Vice-Chair and put forward political views in SLB meetings.

2.1.5 Members agreed that the Chair should decide on the final position on representation for the next meeting.

2.2 A member raised concern over the issue highlighted in 5.7.1 in the minutes relating to the Power of Well-being. He wanted to know if research work had been undertaken to ascertain if the power could be brought forward before reorganisation. The DoE Secretary confirmed that the matter would be looked into when the final decisions had been agreed on the way forward.

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

### **3 Next Steps in the Review Process**

3.1.1 The Chair reported that she had held four very positive bilateral meetings with ministerial colleagues and was due to meet the next four in the coming week. She stated that the Executive sub-committee would meet on the 5<sup>th</sup> December to consider revised proposals. She reiterated that the Emerging Findings paper had always been intended as a first step only.

3.1.2 The Chair went on to say that the campaign by NILGA to present local government's views had been extremely effective and that local government's position had been well reflected in the Assembly debate.

3.2 A member requested clarity on timescales for final decisions. The Chair outlined that the recommendations would be taken to the Executive Committee at the end of January, with an announcement to the Assembly and the public in early February. The member pressed the Chair for an indicative implementation timescale. The Chair reiterated her hope for implementation by 2011. The DoE Joint Secretary stated the only department that had indicated the possibility of a short 6-9 month delay in implementation in the Emerging Findings paper had been Planning. Delivery mechanisms will be explored within the process in the coming months.

3.3 The Vice-Chair reported that NILGA had arranged a series of meetings with Ministers as well. The Chair welcomed this work and commented that it was important for NILGA to speak face to face to Ministers to put forward the local government position.

#### **4 Emerging Findings Report *on Stakeholder Engagement Consultants Paper SLB 22/2007***

4.1.1 The Chair asked a DoE Official to give a short synopsis of the stakeholder engagement process. The DoE Official reported that the department was analysing over 50 written responses and they all have a remarkable resonance in content with the comments gathered at the five stakeholder events. The main points made throughout the process include:

- Local government needs to grasp this opportunity to modernise.
- Strand one of the review was welcomed. However, there was great disappointment with Strand three highlighting that there should have been engagement earlier.
- The attitudes to the Vision were more positive but this is meaningless without significant transfer of functions.
- The list of functions not enough
- Concern about Community Planning in relation to the power base
- Decisions taken in departmental silos

4.1.2 The DoE official finished by commenting that some responses explored alternative models of service delivery and that many responses reported that form could follow function.

4.1.3 NILGA members welcomed the strong and consistent support for a genuinely strong local government sector.

## 5 **NILGA Response**

5.1.1 The Chair invited the NILGA Joint Secretary to present the NILGA response to the Emerging Findings Paper.

The NILGA Joint Secretary presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining the NILGA Response, SOLACE Response and some new thinking detailed in the Beyond Emerging Findings Paper.

The main points made during the presentation were:

- The proposed system will not adequately enhance local accountability or reinvigorate local democracy
- The paper is overly biased towards the existing civil service organisations
- The thinking has been unnecessarily limited due to a lack of meaningful dialogue
- If there is not a reconsideration of these proposals the value of reorganisation is questionable

The group of functions required to deliver strong, effective. Local government were listed as:

- Planning – to include area planning and regeneration as agreed
- Local Roads – to include a creative and integrated delivery model avoiding any diseconomies of scale
- Greater transfer of local economic development powers including control of the Invest NI land bank, local product development and marketing
- A wider rural development role including farm diversification and product development.
- NI Fisheries and Harbours Authority

- Place Shaping Housing Functions
- Youth and Library Services

5.1.2 The SOLACE response emphasised a set of core principles that included; central government should concentrate on the Programme for Government, legislation, regional policies/strategies, budgetary frameworks, performance setting and scrutiny and local government should concentrate on local delivery. She highlighted that both NILGA and SOLACE dispute the figures presented on the transfer of the Roads function.

5.1.3 The NILGA Joint Secretary then presented an alternative approach developed by Colin Stutt, commissioned by Belfast City Council. This additional work was conducted to explore different ways that local and central government could work together. This approach was not the ideal view of local government, but could offer more creative, cost effective solutions. Stutt suggested sub-regional groupings of Councils responsible for functions, such as, Roads and Housing related functions, purchasing services from Regional Delivery Organisations. This approach provides economies of scale and counters the argument of increased cost of devolving functions but facilitates local accountability.

5.1.4 The presentation concluded with the NILGA Joint Secretary requesting that the proposals are reconsidered, a greater cost/benefit analysis is undertaken and closer working relationships with local government practitioners to seek the most suitable and innovative alternatives.

5.1.5 The Chair thanked the NILGA Joint Secretariat for the

presentation and praised NILGA for the work and leadership it has shown throughout the Review of the RPA decisions on local government.

## **6 Views from the Party Representatives**

6.1 The Chair asked representatives from each party to give a short summary of their party views.

6.1.1 An SDLP member commented that his party fully endorsed the NILGA position on the Emerging Findings Paper. His party's response highlighted concerns about the need for statutory governance frameworks, the need for a Planning Appeals Service and an independent regulator for Planning Appeals. He raised the issue of QUANGOS in relation to community planning and suggested that elected members would need to be represented on Health and Education Boards. In addition he raised the issue of how Council assets and debts would be addressed.

6.1.2 A DUP member stated that her party will consider their response next week.

6.1.3 A UUP member commented that their view is exactly in line with the NILGA position.

6.1.4 A Sinn Fein member highlighted that his party is also in line with the NILGA position. He commented that the party response included focusing on a different way to deliver services such as Roads.

6.1.5 An Alliance member reported that his party supported the position of NILGA specifically in relation to shared services and the development of area plans. He specifically highlighted the potential for undermining Community Planning and raised concern about estate management.

6.1.6 The SOLACE member suggested that the debate should focus on the benefits of delivering citizen centric services locally. He raised the issue of central government's ability to make changes happen on the ground and queried the amount of available budget for change. He outlined the potential for augmenting services locally.

6.1.7 Members suggested that the Minister may wish to undertake further economic analysis on the figures relating to the transferring Roads service to councils. She agreed with the view however indicated that there was limited time available to undertake such work.

6.1.8 The Chair thanked members for their views and welcomed any further work in relation to the ongoing review process.

## 7 **Date of next meeting**

7.1 The Chair suggested that the next meeting should be held on 8<sup>th</sup> January from 2 - 4pm in Goodwood House. The Chair also informed members that the secretariat would be circulating dates for future meetings through to August 2008.

**Secretariat to circulate the dates of future meetings through to August 2008**

The date of the next meeting was agreed.

## 8 **Any Other Business**

### 8.1 The NILGA Recruitment Process

The Vice-Chair advised members that the new Director of Communication and Engagement has now taken up position and that the two director posts at NILGA were re-advertised due to a technical issue with the first advertisement. He advised that this should only hold back the process by two to three weeks.

8.2 The Chair expressed her understanding of this issue and wished NILGA well in the ongoing development process.

8.3 The DoE Joint Secretary added that NILGA should receive a detailed offer for the Business Case before Christmas and this was welcomed by members.

8.4.1 A member raised the issue of outstanding Taskforce issues and noted that they still needed to be addressed.

8.4.2 The Chair agreed that the outstanding issues from the Taskforce need to be addressed.