

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2007

### LOUGH NEAGH DISCOVERY CENTRE, CRAIGAVON

<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 Peter McNaney John McGrillen	Chair NILGA President – Vice Chair DUP DUP NILGA Sinn Fein SDLP Alliance NILGA LG Adviser (SoLACE) LG Adviser (SoLACE)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Paul Simpson Cllr Dermot Curran Ald Sam Gardiner, MLA Cllr John Matthews Ashley Boreland	DOE SDLP NILGA UUP Alliance LG Adviser (Ards BC)
<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 Brian Burns	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 expressed her thanks to Sean McPeake (not present) for his term as NILGA President and Vice-Chair, and wished Alderman Arnold Hatch the best of luck as his replacement. The Chair thanked members for agreeing to the postponement of the meeting from the previously agreed date of 26 September.

1.2 Apologies were noted from Paul Simpson, Councillor Dermot Curran, Alderman Sam Gardiner, Councillor John Matthews, Councillor Sean Begley and Ashley Boreland.

1.3 A member raised an issue on the attribution of names to comments in the minutes. The Chair suggested that members should indicate whether they wish comments to be attributed to them by name before they speak, otherwise the format should remain unchanged.

**Joint Secretariat to attribute comments in the SLB minutes to members by name, where nominated.**

With no objections the minutes were agreed.

## **2 Matters arising**

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

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

## **3 Draft Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for Strategic Leadership Board – *Joint Secretariat Paper SLB 19/2007***

3.1 The Chair asked members for their thoughts on the paper and for agreement to the draft Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for the Strategic Leadership Board.

3.2.1 A member raised an issue concerning the impact that the appointment of Alderman Hatch as the new President of NILGA and Vice-Chair of the SLB would have on party representation, as outlined in paragraph 2 of the Standing Orders section of the paper. The member was concerned that the non party-political role of President of NILGA and Vice-Chair would necessitate the appointment of a new member to have the agreed number of elected representatives from each party represented on the Board. The member felt that to do so would not be in keeping with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA)'s recommendation that the SLB membership should comprise two members from each party.

3.2.2 The Chair suggested that members accept the paper in principal and that any issues surrounding party representation on the SLB could be dealt with at a later date.

3.2.3 Members agreed that the matter was for their parties to decide and suggested that the matter be discussed and a position paper submitted to the Chair.

**DUP to consult party.**

With no objections, the paper was accepted in principal.

#### **4 Review of Local Government RPA Decisions – Progress Report – *DOE Paper SLB 20/2007***

4.1 The Chair noted that there has been slight slippage in the timetable for the review and that on current plans the Sub-

committee aims to report to the Executive at the first meeting in January and to announce decisions to the Assembly and then to the public the following week. She noted that the possibility of a General Election may present some difficulties as it would place the Departments in purdah and may cause the timetable to slip by about a month.

- 4.2.1 Members welcomed the opportunity to attend the regional stakeholder events which have been arranged by the review team, as the events provide an opportunity to comment on the matters being considered by the review and to allow for discussion of the rationale behind the decisions on the transfer of functions, number of councils etc.
- 4.2.2 The DoE Joint Secretary noted that he is keen for senior representatives from other Departments to attend the workshops being arranged as part of the stakeholder engagement process, and that PricewaterhouseCoopers are currently looking for suitable public sector venues to stage these events, beginning in the second week of November.
- 4.2.3 A member noted that a discussion on the number of councils and the functions to transfer to local government would be key to the success of these events.

4.2.4 The Chair expressed the view that stakeholder engagement should concentrate on the issues surrounding the transfer of functions, as the issue of council numbers is essentially a political one.

**5 Modernising Agenda – Subgroup Report – *Joint Secretariat Paper – SLB 21/2007***

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

**Sub-Group A**

5.2 Mervyn Storey wished to note his appreciation to Arnold Hatch for chairing the first meeting of Sub-Group A in his absence and for putting together a very comprehensive briefing paper for the Strand A Sub-Group, which had its first meeting on 24 September.

5.3 The Vice-Chair spoke to a paper he had prepared from the first meeting of the Sub-Group which outlined the progress to date.

5.4 **Legislation:**

The Vice-Chair noted that there has been significant progress towards the introduction of new legislation and that some elements had already been drafted. Subject to Ministerial approval legislation will go forward on: Finance; Remuneration; Severance; Mandatory Codes of Conduct; and Ethical Standards.

5.5.1 Finance/Remuneration

A member raised the issue of severance arrangements for councillors, in light of the rumours about elections for the 26 existing council areas in 2009. The member was concerned that councillors who have given long service would be forced to serve another four years to ensure that they receive a full severance package.

5.5.2 The Chair noted that she intends to speak to the Secretary of State on the matter of postponing the proposed elections until 2011, but that with the uncertainty that surrounds the issue of the number of councils the time is not right to begin those discussions. The Chair noted that an option could be to go ahead with elections in 2009 and bring in new members and begin capacity building.

**Chair to raise the issue of the timing of council elections and severance packages with the Secretary of State at the end of the review process.**

5.5.3 A member noted that this approach could result in councillors who have served for a long time leaving public service without an appropriate severance package.

5.5.4 The DoE Joint Secretary noted that other options for severance packages would be considered. Councillors could be offered the package over a longer time or in two phases with an initial package being followed by a second at a later date.

5.5.5 The Chair confirmed that these options would be considered

and that councillors who had given thirty years of service would not be asked for four more to ensure that they benefited from an appropriate severance package.

5.5.6 The Vice-Chair suggested that the Chair should say something on this issue publicly at the appropriate time to allay fears on this issue. He also noted that the issues surrounding the severance package and Capacity Building are linked.

5.6.1 Participation in limited companies:

The Vice-Chair noted that the issue of participation in limited companies may not form part of the Modernisation Order but could be introduced in subsequent legislation.

5.6.2 The DOE Joint Secretary noted that it is important to introduce these provisions as soon as possible. He suggested that a small working group of officers could be established to unlock the issues surrounding participation in limited companies and the impact that this will have on legislative proposals, for example - in the Waste Management Order.

5.7.1 Power of Well-Being:

The Vice-Chair raised an issue to request that the Department look into the issue to bring this forward in advance of reorganisation.

5.7.2 The DoE Joint Secretary pointed out to members that a Power of Well-Being, based on the English model, could be established quickly in Northern Ireland if the Assembly is willing and that he would look into the possibilities of bringing

it forward.

5.8 Governance and Performance Management Issues:

The Vice-Chair confirmed that Governance and Performance Management will be in the Modernisation Order.

5.9.1 Capacity Building

Members of the subgroup agreed that there was a need to focus on the priorities for action on Capacity Building.

5.9.2 The Vice-Chair noted that members of the Sub-Group had agreed to hold an Away Day to allow time to consider the wider issues surrounding Capacity Building. The Away Day will take place on 31 October at the Magherafelt Council offices from 10.00am to 2.00pm. A member noted that the officer representation for this group would be Geraldine McGahey, Chief Executive of Larne Borough Council; Eddie Curtis from Newry and Mourne District Council; and Sharon Currans from Banbridge District Council.

**Sub-Group B**

5.10 In the absence of the Sub-Group Chair a member spoke to the summary paper on the first meeting of Sub-Group B.

5.11 The member noted that excellent progress had been made by the group. The first meeting was held on 10 September in the NILGA Offices. The meeting considered a number of areas for future work: exploring the potential for a common internet network for local government; considering common procurement procedures to save councils money; and examining the possibility of implementing local authority

customer relationship management.

- 5.12 The member noted that the group had also held an Away Day on 4 October where presentations were made on the Delivery and Innovation Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Local Government Services Board in the Republic of Ireland. There was also a presentation from Danny O'Connell of Deloitte. These presentations will form the basis for discussions at the next meeting of the sub-group.
- 5.13 A member noted that the sub-group recognised that there is still a lot of work to do, especially on the feasibility of all the options. At its next meeting, on 17 October, the group will be considering NI Direct and the issues around Shared Services.
- 5.14 The member also noted that the Sub-Group has officer support from Danny McSorley, Chief Executive of Omagh District Council, Rose Crozier, of Belfast City Council, and John Gillanders of Lisburn City Council.
- 5.15.1 A member noted that Sir Michael Bichard would be speaking at the SOCITM conference at the Waterfront Hall on Monday 15 October and it might be worthwhile for the Chair to attend.

- 5.15.2 The Chair agreed that it would be valuable to meet with Sir Michael and that she would check her diary to see if she was free to attend.

## **6 NILGA Business Case – Verbal Update**

- 6.1 The Chair noted that, following initial referral to DFP for the necessary approval, DFP raised a few queries around the economic appraisal process. With the assistance of Departmental economists, the proposal was re-submitted on 25 September. She invited the DoE Joint Secretary to inform members of the current position.
- 6.1.2 The DoE Joint Secretary was pleased to inform members that the NILGA Business Case had been approved by DFP.
- 6.1.3 Members welcomed this news and the Vice-Chair noted that this confirmation would allow them to press ahead with their recruitment campaign.

## **7 Date of next meeting**

- 7.1 The Chair noted that meetings had been scheduled for 24 October and 5 December and that changes in the timetable for presenting the emerging findings and final outcome of the Review to the Executive will have a knock-on effect on these meetings. The Chair suggested that the meeting on 24 October be cancelled, as there is unlikely to have been sufficient progress made to ensure a substantial agenda. The Chair suggested that the next meeting be held on 5 December at 2pm.

The date of the next meeting was agreed.

## **8 Any Other Business**

### **8.1 Delivery of EU Funding Programmes**

A member noted that a meeting was held on 26 September between DARD, DETI, SEUPB and representatives from the majority of councils. The member noted that two key points had arisen from the meeting. The first was that there should be a commonality of approach to the delivery of the three funds. The second was that there was a desire to move ahead quickly and form partnerships but there is a reluctance to move before council numbers are clear.

- 8.2 The Chair noted that DARD is setting up an audit structure for funding and that the administrative burden of setting up and auditing three separate funding models would be enormous. She noted that the existing model used for DETI would work

for DARD.

8.3 The DoE Joint Secretary informed members that he had instructed officials to arrange a further meeting with NILGA, SEUPB and relevant Departmental representatives, which DoE will Chair, to discuss the specific concerns raised by NILGA addressing delivery issues around the new round of EU Funding Programmes.

**DoE Officials  
to arrange a  
further meeting  
on EU Funding  
Programmes**

8.4.1 Clustering of Councils

The Vice-Chair raised the issue of the clustering of councils. A lack of clarity on the likely number of councils is forcing councils to cluster in groups which may not align with their ultimate position. He noted that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development had advised that councils could cluster with whom they liked. The Vice-Chair noted that councils do not want to form numerous partnerships and that one large partnership would better meet the requirements of various projects.