

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2007

STORMONT HOTEL BELFAST

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

Actions

1 Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to this, her first meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board and asked members to introduce themselves. Apologies were noted from Councillor Alex Maskey MLA and Councillor Mervyn Storey MLA.

2 Minutes of Last Meeting

- 2.1 A DUP representative advised that the comments in paragraphs 6.3 and 7.4 – ‘that representation on the SLB and Policy Development Panels should be commensurate with party strength in the NI Assembly’ should read ‘should be commensurate with party strength at the last Local Government elections.

Joint Secretariat to amend minutes of the last Meeting

Subject to this amendment the Minutes were agreed.

3 Matters arising

- 3.1.1 DE Presentation - A member suggested that the Department of Education should be included in the proposed review of the RPA decisions of the previous administration, as the make-up of the proposed Education and Skills Authority will not be sufficiently representative or democratic as it may not provide the appropriate mix of expertise, skills and geographical balance if it does not include local elected representatives. They commented that elected representatives had been excluded from the new Strategic Health Authority.

- 3.1.2 Members also raised the issue of the impact on the new structures in health and education if the number of proposed Councils changes. The Chair indicated her understanding that health would be able to interface with whatever number of councils is agreed, but will be meeting with the Education Minister to discuss the matter.

Chair to raise with Ministerial colleagues.

The DOE Joint Secretary advised that the presentation from the Department of Education was to the previous administration, and that if NILGA felt strongly about the matter they should write to the relevant Executive Minister.

- 3.2.1 Stocktake Reports - The NILGA Joint Secretary expressed concern that the current RPA timetable does not allow for Community Planning until 2011 and articulated the view that it would be desirable for work to begin before this. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that community planning formed part of the review process (discussed at item 4 below), but that the intention remained that the process would be piloted in advance of the creation of the new councils.

- 3.2.2 Members expressed concern that the work on governance was not yet agreed. Referring to the work of the Governance sub-group a member expressed the view that there should be a degree of flexibility for Councils to set up structures that are fit for purpose, and that the legislative provisions should be permissive rather than prescriptive. A member supported the position that there should be prescription at the start to provide consistency, when the new Councils are dealing with issues

around HQ location, staffing structures etc, but that there should then be a review. A member also raised the concern that the recruitment of new senior staff is still proceeding and that it would be difficult to draw back from any decisions.

The Chair indicated that further work would be required on any proposed governance arrangements.

3.3.1 DFP Presentation - A member raised the issue of the location of the civic Headquarters for the new councils in relation to the draft 'Guiding Principles on the Location of Public Sector Jobs' issued by DFP. Some members expressed the view that there should be government offices outside the greater Belfast area housing a number of Departments rather than individual Departments seeking to retain jobs in a single location. The view was also expressed that such offices could also house Local Government services.

3.3.2 The DOE Joint Secretary noted that the consultation relating to the location of public sector jobs had been limited to looking at the equality perspective of jobs within the new councils and did not look at the distribution. The Chair advised that the location of civil service jobs is a matter for the DFP Minister and that she would be discussing this with the Executive in due course. The Chair indicated that she would update members following these discussions

Update to be provided to members at a subsequent meeting

3.3.3 Referring to the concept of shared facilities for both central & local government operations a member noted that the new single direct phone-number for Government services proposed by DFP does not include access to any local government services. The Chair indicated that she is keen that local government services should be included, particularly given the recent flooding issues and reports that people tended to contact their local government representatives first.

A DOE representative reported that this matter had been raised with DFP and that it would be discussed with the NILGA e-Government Group. It was also confirmed that the issue of compatibility of databases across Councils and central Government would be examined as part of the modernising programme.

Egovt to explore opportunities to include LG in single number contact for public services

3.4 Establishment of Policy Development Panels - The Chair advised that the Taskforce structure will need to be reviewed over the coming months to determine the most appropriate structure to implement an integrated modernisation and reform agenda, once the Executive agree the outcome of the review of local government RPA decision. An interim arrangement to support the early stages of the development of the modernisation programme will be discussed under Agenda Item 7.

3.5 A member suggested that Agenda items 4 and 5, on 'Remuneration for Strategic Leadership Board elected members' and 'NILGA Development' should be taken after the presentations. The members agreed.

4 Review of RPA decisions relating to local government - SLB 13/2007

4.1 A DOE representative presented on the key issues set out in the paper on the Review of RPA decisions relating to local government. She informed members that the review will be led by a sub-committee of the Executive, chaired by the Environment Minister, and drew members' attention to the key elements of the process and its timetable.

4.2 A member raised the issue of the involvement of NILGA and the local government sector in the review process. The DOE representative advised that NILGA is a key stakeholder in the process and that their involvement will be critical for the engagement process in the early autumn. The Chair confirmed that as the review is taken forward she will want to work in partnership with NILGA and engage fully with the sector.

4.3 Referring to the proposed transfer of functions a member highlighted that individual Departments' views on what should transfer differed significantly from those of local government. The member pointed to previous discussions relating to the potential transfer of responsibility for economic development and suggested that the DETI Minister should be involved in the Executive sub-committee. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that the intention is to have a small group of Ministers to take charge of the review and push it forward but that the Minister will be engaging in bilateral discussions with the other Ministers. The member enquired about who would decide what is significant in relation to functions. The Chair agreed to take these comments on board in her bilateral discussions with Ministerial colleagues.

4.4 A member raised the issue of wider stakeholder involvement highlighting the need to ensure that any working groups have appropriate representation by elected members and that only those stakeholders who can add to the process are included. Other members supported the view that the Board has an interest in the range of stakeholders to be involved. A member indicated that there could be criticism for not involving stakeholders in the process. The Chair indicated that there will be a need to achieve a balance in the involvement of stakeholders.

4.5 A member highlighted a concern that the 7 Council model was being considered as part of the review. The Chair advised

that the review needs to consider all the models that were consulted upon.

- 4.6 Referring to the proposed scope of the review a member raised the issue of the proposed Northern Ireland Libraries Authority. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that the Executive had agreed to the introduction of a Bill for the single Authority but that the Minister had met Minister Poots to discuss the interface with local government, and the scope in the longer term for the delivery of library services by the sector. The Chair confirmed that she is keen to pursue this aspect in the future.
- 4.7 The member also raised the issue of youth services and asked if this would be a decision for the Education Minister. The Chair indicated that final decisions on the functions to transfer would be a matter for the Executive informed by her bilateral discussions with Ministerial colleagues.
- 4.8 Members went on to discuss the visioning process. A member advised that the vision needs to be a shared collective vision on what is best for public service. A key issue is community planning and if the functions do not transfer to local government, then community planning may not be deliverable. The Chair confirmed the need to examine the interaction between the transfer of functions and community planning.
- 4.9 A member highlighted the need to include any qualitative issues highlighted as part of the visioning exercise. The Chair confirmed that the review and the vision for local government is not just about costs.
- 4.10 Members expressed the view that the vision should not be based on the Northern Ireland experience alone but should look at other jurisdictions. The DOE representative confirmed that the desk research would look at this aspect. Members went on to highlight the need for local government to own the vision. A member proposed and the Minister agreed that a progress report covering all aspects of the visioning process should be presented to the next meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board.
- 4.11 Members highlighted a range of services that are delivered by local government in other jurisdictions and asked that these be examined as part of the review. The Chair confirmed that these would be considered.

**Joint Secretariat
to provide paper
on visioning
process**

5 Modernisation Programme – SLB 14/2007

- 5.1 A representative from DOE presented on the key points in the Modernisation Programme paper that had been circulated. He informed members that the work on modernisation will be taken forward in parallel with the RPA review by two sub-groups of the SLB: a legislative framework and capacity building sub-group; and a service improvement sub-group. Both groups will be chaired by SLB members.
- 5.2 A member asked about the timescale for the next council elections. The DOE Joint Secretary indicated that under the revised timetable the plan is for new Councils to be in place in 2011. There is an issue of whether to extend life of Councils for two years or have elections in 2009. This would be a matter for the Executive to consider and raise with the Secretary of State. A member indicated support for the approach but highlighted need to develop capacity of NILGA and the sector to be able to take the programme forward.
- 5.3 Referring to the proposal that the sub-groups would provide an interim arrangement for six months to take forward the modernisation programme a member asked whether the PDPs would then be established as support would be conditional on this aspect. The Chair indicated that PDPs would be established in due course to support the implementation of the reform and modernisation.
- 5.4 The DOE Joint Secretary advised that there is now an expanded agenda with the inclusion of how services will be delivered and the SLB will need to consider over the autumn whether the five PDP model is the best way forward.
- 5.5 A member sought reassurance that if the PDPs are to be replaced by sub-groups that elected members would take decisions supported by officers. The Chair confirmed that elected representatives would have primacy and that she remained committed to a partnership approach to taking the programme forward.
- 5.6 A member asked whether funds to support the modernisation programme will be available after there is clarity on the proposed number of Councils. The Chair advised that this funding is included in the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review bid but that outcome will not be known until early next year.
- 5.7 A member enquired about the process for the appointment of Senior Council Officers to the sub-groups. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that he is aware of the debate on this issue and that discussions have been taking place with NILGA. He indicated that this needs to be looked at carefully over the new

few weeks to develop a sensible approach that will ensure that appropriate officers are involved in the programme.

- 5.8 On the issue of elected member representation on the sub-groups the Chair agreed to initiate a nomination process as soon as possible.

DoE and NILGA to work on an appropriate nomination process

6 Remuneration for Strategic Leadership Board elected members

- 6.1 The Chair confirmed that elected members will continue to receive an allowance of £2,700 per annum, paid on a monthly basis, for their participation in the Local Government Taskforce and that arrangements are in hand for the processing of outstanding payments for earlier months.
- 6.2 Welcoming the Chair's decision a member expressed concern in relation to the final paragraph of the letter to NILGA on the matter and indicated that any new remuneration package which took account of an increased role for the SLB should be backdated to its initial establishment.

The DOE Joint Secretary advised that this would need to be considered in the context of any new structure and examination of the rationale for backdating.

The Chair indicated that a decision on backdating could not be taken until a later stage when all the pertinent issues could be examined.

7 NILGA Development

- 7.1 The Chair advised that the Department would provide 85% of the salary for a new NILGA Communications Director. This would represent a total of £180K over the next 3 years. Members thanked the Chair for this support.
- 7.2 Members advised that NILGA currently has limited staff resources to take forward the required programme of work and requested that the Department provide funding for the other two Directors' posts and supporting staff. The DOE Joint Secretary advised that the Department is looking at a funding package to allow NILGA to recruit appropriate staff and would aim to have agreement in time for the next SLB meeting. NILGA members emphasised that they would not be able to play their proper role as equal partner in the modernisation programme without the necessary resources, and urged the Department to deal the matter with some urgency.

Details of funding package for NILGA to be presented at the next SLB meeting.

8 Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for SLB

- 8.1 The Chair suggested that decisions on this matter should be postponed until the autumn as the structure to take forward the modernisation programme and, in due course, to deliver an agreed set of structural reform decisions, will need to be determined over the next few months. A member expressed the view that the core role of the SLB is not changing, while another commented that the process for decision making needs to be addressed.

The Chair indicated that a paper on the SLB (excluding the PDPs) would be tabled at the next meeting.

ToR for SLB to be considered at next meeting

9 Date of next meeting

- 9.1 It was agreed that the next meeting would be scheduled for 15 August at 2.30pm, in the same venue.

Joint Secretariat to issue invitations and papers

10 Any Other Business

- 10.1 Partnership Arrangements - A member raised the issue of local government's relationship with central government and recommended the development of a compact or Memorandum of Understanding to underpin partnership arrangements in advance of 2011. It was indicated that the visioning exercise would inform agreement on such arrangements, and that the issue could be addressed before 2011.
- 10.2 Representation on Public Bodies – A member highlighted NILGA's concerns in relation to the position of elected representatives on public bodies. It was indicated that the exclusion of nominated elected representatives as a requirement of the public appointment process removes an important dimension to the composition of these bodies and can also create problems of geographical spread. The Chair indicated that she would write to Ministerial colleagues on the matter but also encouraged NILGA to do so.
- 10.3 Central Joint Forum - A member asked about the current status of the Central Joint Forum and asked if Ministers had been made aware of its role as local government, as a major employer, was not represented on the Forum. Members were advised that the Forum is scheduled to meet on 10 July but that the DFP Minister is tabling a paper for discussion at the Executive in relation to the status of the Public Service Commission which may impact on the need for the Forum.

Minister to write to colleagues on the issue of local government representation in public bodies.