

Key Outcomes from Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) 9 December 2009

1. Welcome

Minutes of Meetings

- Minutes from the previous SLB meeting on 16 October 2009 were approved subject to the inclusion of an amendment. The revised minutes will be available soon on the Local Government section of the DOE website on www.doeni.gov.uk and the NILGA website www.nilga.org.

Personnel Changes

- Minister Poots, on behalf of the SLB, welcomed Cllr Roy Beggs MLA to the Board following the resignation of Ald Sam Gardiner. The Minister also expressed his thanks to Ald Gardiner for his valuable contribution to the Board's deliberations.

2. Economic Appraisal

Assessment of Options for Local Government Service Delivery – Phase 2 Report (PwC report)

- NILGA presented an overview of the local government views on the PwC report. This relayed that overall councils, Transition Committees and local government groups support the 13 recommendations within the report. However the following recommendations were either rejected or highlighted as requiring significant further work:
 - While there was strong agreement to support the principles of option 5 (Transformation with Regional Collaboration) the Business Services Organisation, as described in the report, was unanimously rejected. NILGA set out an alternative option to create an enabling organisation/Improvement Service to support regional collaboration. Such a body could be modelled on the arrangements in other regions, where a small team, accountable to local government has been established, with a supporting role to councils to develop collaborative projects and support the development of improvement projects.

- Due to a lack of political consensus, it was felt that further work was required on the creation of a Single Waste Disposal Authority. However it was recognised that there may be merit in exploring opportunities for developing a more collaborative approach to waste management.
 - Concerns were raised about the lack of confidence across the sector, including Local Government Finance Officers, regarding the detail of the costs and efficiencies articulated in the report. Whilst it was recognised that it was not possible to have full details of all the costs and benefits, it was considered imperative that the assumptions and methods used in the report are further examined before the report's key findings and recommendations are approved.
 - Local government concerns about the funding of the change process were also reiterated including the need for funding from central government.
- PwC presented the key issues arising from the stakeholder engagement process; their thoughts on why these issues had arisen; and the implications for the recommendations in the Economic Appraisal.
 - PwC reflected that these issues need to be addressed through the next stage which is the detailed design phase.
 - The Minister asked local government to explain how efficiencies could be gained using their proposal of an Improvement Service (Enabling) Model. NILGA agreed to undertake further work, in liaison with the sector, to set out how such a voluntary model could work which the Minister agreed to consider.
 - The Minister also clarified that in his view a Business Services Organisation would be there to serve local government with representatives from local government driving the decisions. He also suggested that there could be various functions that could be distributed throughout Northern Ireland.

3. Funding

- Minister Poots informed SLB members that he had met with Minister Wilson from the Department of Finance and Personnel to discuss funding the reform programme.
- Minister Poots confirmed that he had made the case that there should be an element of funding from both local government and central government with central government contributing to costs associated with the restructuring of councils, e.g. severance for members and officers, setting up local government regional initiatives, etc and local government contributing to costs of reform initiatives where the benefits and savings will be realised by councils.
- Minister Poots relayed that the Finance Minister advised that DOE would need to make a compelling case as to why the Executive should prioritise funding for reorganisation. The Finance Minister explained that the current financial climate and budgetary constraints on the Executive are extremely grave and look likely to be so in the future.
- The Finance Minister indicated that local government would ultimately benefit from the efficiencies and savings flowing from the reform programme and that there was a strong argument therefore that local government should fund the up-front costs of reform in return for the obvious financial benefits. Minister Wilson said that he would consider a funding model based around extending the existing Capital Loans' Regime to cover revenue costs with the repayment of the loan clearly linked to savings made through reform.
- Minister Poots asked local government representatives to advise him of the areas of the reform process that local government felt it would be reasonable to fund in order to facilitate further discussions on the issue.
- Whilst local government agreed to undertake further work and discussion on this issue, they made it clear that the sector's position was that central government should fund the change process.

4. Legislation Programme Update Boundaries

- Cllr Matthews reiterated the negative impact that the delay in progressing legislation on boundaries was having on the sector.
- Minister Poots confirmed that he had received Cllr Matthews' letter which urges the Executive to urgently resolve this as a matter of priority.
- Minister Poots assured SLB members that he was doing everything in his power to progress the issue and that he would continue to work with Executive colleagues to move forward on a number of critical outstanding issues. He indicated that there should be a clear direction on the way forward by early 2010.

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, Finance Bill and Reorganisation Bill

- Minister Poots confirmed that the Miscellaneous Provision Bill and the Finance Bill were both on track.
- The Minister indicated that the delay in going out to public consultation on the Reorganisation Bill was because the consultation document had not yet been cleared by the Executive. He said that he hoped that this consultation would be issued shortly as further delays could result in the need for accelerated passage which would reduce the time for the necessary legislative scrutiny.

5. Policy Development Panel Updates

Policy Development Panel A (PDP A) – Governance, Central/Local Relations and Community Planning

- PDP A confirmed that practical guidance on determining representation on Statutory Transition Committees (STCs) was nearing completion; that work was ongoing to develop model Standing Orders for STCs; and that proposals for 'Call In' procedures were nearing completion.
- PDP A also indicated that they anticipated a launch of the Community Planning Foundation Programme in early 2010.

Policy Development Panel B (PDP B) – Service Delivery

- PDP B presented a paper on the policy proposals on the development of a customer focused approach to service delivery within the new councils.
- It was explained that these proposals are designed to provide a support framework for Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams moving forward over the coming months. PDP B also confirmed that a resource pack would be made available and updated based on experiences and lessons learnt.
- This paper was approved by the SLB and will now go to the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) for implementation.
- PDP B explained that the Panel had agreed to undertake work to develop a Procurement Strategy for the sector, but that resources were required for some consultancy work which had not yet been formally agreed. The Department agreed to look in to the matter.

Policy Development Panel C (PDP C) – Structural Reform

- PDP C relayed that they were currently considering proposals on funding arrangements for the transfer of functions.

6. Implementation Update

Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) (Verbal Update)

- A verbal update was provided on the last RTCG meeting that took place on 2 December.
- Discussions also took place on current central contract arrangements regarding parking enforcement; a function which is due to transfer to councils in May 2011. The recommendation to extend the current contract to 2012 was agreed, and it was recognised that delivery on a regional basis was the most practical way forward. This would allow councils 18 months to make informed decisions on how the service could be delivered in the future.

Regional Transition Committee (RTC)

- NILGA presented proposals on how to increase the numbers on the new Regional Transition Committee to accommodate political representation. This was based on the d'Hondt model.
- SLB members agreed proposals for ensuring proportional representation on the membership of the Regional Transition Committee (RTC).

Local Government Reform Implementation Framework and Programme Update

- The updated implementation programme highlighting key policy/strategic milestones in the reform programme was presented.
- It was reported that PA Consulting have been meeting Transition Committees to explain the new reporting process that will replace the Implementation Framework.
- It was also confirmed that training will be provided for Change Managers on these reporting templates on a one to one basis and that this will be complete by the next SLB meeting. This means that SLB will receive the information for their next meeting using the new templates.

Local Government Reform Executive Sub Committee

- Minister Poots reported that the second meeting of the Local Government Reform Executive Sub Committee took place on 23 November.
- Ministers had confirmed their support for the approach that NI Civil Service staff transferring to local government would do so on the basis of temporary transfer arrangements similar to those arrangements employed by staff transferring to the new health and social care bodies. Final decisions on these transfers will rest with Ministers. The Joint Forum's role will be to discuss how these can best be implemented.
- It was also confirmed that the Sub Committee agreed that Civil Service staff transferring to local government, either on a temporary or permanent basis, would retain their membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme Northern Ireland.

7. Any Other Business

Date of Next Meeting

- A date for the next meeting in February is yet to be confirmed as the proposed date is unsuitable for NILGA members.

Please note: The information above may be subject to change. The formal minutes will represent the information in finalised format.

Joint Secretariat