

**LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMHAIRLE BHUIRG LÉIM AN MHADAIDH**

13 JUNE 2005

Minutes of special meeting held in the Council Offices, 7 Connell Street, Limavady at 7.30 pm on the above date.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Coyle

Other Members: Aldermen G Mullan, G Robinson and J Rankin. Councillors A Brolly, P Butcher, L Cubitt, B Chivers, B Douglas, C Ó hOisín, J F McElhinney, A Robinson and E Stevenson.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Committee Clerk, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Corporate Policy and Town Clerk & Chief Executive.

APOLIGIES:

Councillor Carten and Councillor Donaghy.

REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND – FURTHER CONSULTATION (RPA):

The Chair welcomed Mr David Finegan, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Mr Tom Frawley, Chairman Independent Experts for RPA and Ms Heather Moorhead, Chief Executive Northern Ireland Local Government Association to the meeting.

Mr Finegan explained that the review process had been launched in June 2002, with the first consultation held between October 2003 and February 2004 and from 22 March until 30 September 2005 further consultations would take place. He said that final decisions would be made early in 2006 and implementation of RPA would commence through to 2009.

Mr Finegan highlighted that the message from first consultation was that there was a need for high quality, accessible services for all; strong local government with fewer, but larger Councils; urgent need for change; fewer service delivery organisations and more collaboration – co-terminosity.

Mr Finegan referred to the second consultation and said responses to proposals on health, education, human resource issues, equality & social need, options on Local Government and QUANGO's should be forwarded by 30 September 2005. Members noted the following proposals:

Health Bodies:

- existing 4 boards and 18 Trusts (exception being Ambulance Trust) to be replaced by either 5 or 7 sub-regional health and personal social service agencies;
- the 6 existing regional health bodies would be reduce to 4;
- a regional health forum would be established;
- the 4 Health & Social Services Councils would be replaced by 1 regional body.

Education:

- front line delivery of education remained unchanged;
- Department of Education core role remained, but with significant change in relation to operational functions;
- major changes to organisation of support services for the front line.

Key points on Education

Single education services support body; curriculum & teacher support; review of advice services; inspection, monitoring & research; youth services/schools' estate and supporting education at a local level.

Local Government Options:

- system of safeguards essential;
- stronger local government, with a greater range of powers and functions;
- central role in developing and co-ordinating service delivery through community planning;
- strong civic leadership role;
- three illustrative options proposed, based around configurations of 7, 11 and 15 Council's; and
- decisions on actual Council boundaries will be the responsibility of an independent Boundary Commissioner.

Key considerations on number of Council's

Population for efficient delivery of services; Co-terminosity; equality and social need; population and compactness; wealth base; geography; regional development/other strategies and local identity.

Mr Finegan stated that the 7 Council model was considered the most efficient for service delivery, although some believe it would not deliver localism; in that it would provide economies of scale; give full 1:1 co-terminosity; would facilitate strong collaboration and community planning and 'Civic Council's' proposed to ensure local engagement and community participation.

In relation to the proposed 11 Council Model, Mr Finegan said there would be 1 – 1 co-terminosity with some service providers, with health bodies being the notable exception, where 2:1 could be possible. It would be less effective for

collaborative working and would have a loss in economies of scale compared with 7 Councils, but may be better in facilitating localism.

Members noted that the 15 Council model would be less efficient in achieving economies of scale but would be stronger in facilitating localism and that the parliamentary boundary model would provide political co-terminosity but would have shortcomings for service delivery. It was also noted that it would not be possible to achieve 1:1 co-terminosity with other service providers, although 2:1 or 3:1 may be possible.

Mr Finegan confirmed that the two options proposed for public bodies were either:

1. abolition, with functions transferred to central or local government or
2. review to minimise the number of bodies and improve accountability.

He said that it was proposed that the future of the 18 Executive Agencies would be left a returning Executive and Assembly.

Mr Fawley highlighted the importance of managing the impact on staff and developing leadership capacity central to delivering change. He said that contact would be on-going with trade unions; with equality being an underlying principle and that change would result in savings in administration costs that would be available for reallocation to front line services.

Finally, Mr Finegan said as the review was coming to an end, decisions had to be made regarding the final shape of local government and that agreement was needed on the list of functions for local government, with a need to build capacity to meet the challenge of change.

NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION:

Ms Heather Moorhead gave a brief outline of NILGA, its members, objectives and activities. She said that following conferences and RPA meetings, there was strong agreement around the following:

- need for one strong unified voice for the sector;
- modern governance arrangements, mandatory checks and balances;
- appropriate funding mechanisms
- the power of well being and a community planning role
- between 10 and 15 Councils, with 15 the preferred option and
- retention/enhancement of all existing functions, powers and services

Ms Moorhead stated that the RPA needed further input and debate, especially in major areas of service delivery (Planning, Housing, Education and Health & Social Services), plus a need to demonstrate equity and consider managerial implications.

Members agreed that from now until September there was a need to discuss implications with party leaders, members and Councils and have an input from officer groupings. In addition to this Council should press for modernising agenda and capacity building in advance of RPA implementation.

Ms Moorhead reinforced the need for a strong local government, with it being the hub of the wheel and having the ability to effect change in local areas and working in partner with Government in policy making. She referred to the umbrella of Community Planning and the enhanced services in Community & Leisure, Health & Regulatory Services, Environmental Services, Economic Development and Planning & Development.

In conclusion Ms Moorhead said the key issues and questions were:

- Do we really want a strong local government?
- If so, what services?
- Are Council's happy with Executive Bodies?
- Health and Social Services – not yet discussed?

Councillor Cubitt pointed out that Council had very little time to discuss the changes before the RPA was enforced by Ministers. Mr Finegan responded that the review had been on-going for 3 years and now was the time to draw a conclusion and get it implemented.

Councillor Coyle queried if Council would have to increase the rates to pay for new services. Mr Finegan indicated that rates may have to be increased if services were to be improved but that funding would transfer with services from central government.

In response to Alderman Mullans' query on implementation, Mr Frawley said it would be difficult to predict the effect of change without a proper design but no doubt staff would be affected, especially senior management teams and change would be a leadership challenge.

Alderman Rankin said he looked forward to the change but hoped that this would not cause the same uncertainty which had occurred through change in 1970's.

Alderman Robinson was of the opinion that Council might be a small fish in big pond when the 26 Council's were reduced to either 7, 11 or 15 and said it was important that staff were kept fully informed.

Councillor Douglas voiced his concern that if Limavady was submerged with Derry City Council they would have little in common. Mr Frawley pointed out that rural and urban areas had shared values and said that if the composition of the city were examined, it would be found to consist of a number of small communities.

It was agreed that the RPA would be further discussed in consultation with NILGA and that a special meeting of Council would be held in August 2005.

The chair thanked members of the RPA team and NILGA for attending the meeting.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
(The meeting ended at 10.00 pm)