

Informal note of the Meeting between the Local Government Panel and Health and Safety Commission

15 May 2007

Present:

LGP: Cllr Geoffrey Theobald (Chair); Cllr Graham Allen; Cllr Roland Domleo; Cllr Anne Lucas.

HSC: Bill Callaghan; Sandy Blair; Danny Carrigan; Judith Donovan; Sayeed Khan; Robin Dahlberg; Liz Snape.

LACORS: Derek Allen; Mark Du Val; Charles Loft.

HSE: Phil Scott; Giles Denham, Neal Stone.

Apologies:

Cllr Caroline Seymour; John Longworth; John Spanswick; Hugh Robertson

1. The Chair explained the informal nature of the meeting and that there was only one item to be discussed, the proposed merger of HSC and HSE and its implications for the relationship between HSC and LGP.

2. BC said that the merger proposals had been approved at that morning's HSC meeting and that he would now ask the Minister to take the next steps. The first of these would be for DWP to draw up a consultative document.

Local government representation on the new body:

3. HSC favoured a new body consisting of between 9 and 11 non-executive members and a chair.

4. There had been a variety of views on local government representation among commissioners, but the proposal that one member should be appointed following consultation with bodies representing local government had been agreed.

5. Under existing arrangements, three commissioners were appointed following consultation with employer organisations, three following consultation with organisations representing employees and three following consultation with 'various bodies'. In practice one from the last category had always been appointed to hold the 'local government' brief.

6. The LGP took the view that there should be two non-executives with a local government brief. One of these should be a serving councillor recommended by LGA/LACORS and one a serving officer.

7. BC said that that the consultation was now entering a new stage at which LGP could make representations on this. HSC had acknowledged it may need to be more flexible on numbers and that there should be a seat on the new body for LAs. He expected that DWP would look at the job descriptions of commissioners as part of the merger reorganisation. It would be up to ministers to decide on how many commissioners were to be allotted to each category but, in his view, while it would be important to build in flexibility, there would need to be parity between employers and employees and their representation should remain significant overall.

8. JD added that commissioners were appointed as individuals not as representatives and the HSC had agreed that this should be the case with non-executives on the new body.

Name of merged body:

9. Commissioners explained that while there had been differing opinions among them over whether the new organisation should have a new name, they had decided to recommend using Health and Safety Executive. Reasons for this were: agreement early on that change would not be radical; perception of HSE as a strong brand and concern at reaction from staff and public to the perceived cost of unnecessary re-branding.

10. In discussion there was support for some of the points in para 9 from some LGP members; but it was also suggested that the merger presented a rare opportunity to take stock and to signal a change; in the circumstances a new name might give local authorities a positive sense of ownership and partnership. HSC/E's proposal to recommend to minister continuing use of the HSE brand was noted.

Local Government's role in HSC policy-making:

11. GT asked how the HSC envisioned the new organisation working. In particular how would local government be given an opportunity to influence the development of policy and how would HELA and the LGP fit in?

12. BC said that whatever happened there needed to be a constructive relationship and one that enabled HSE to tap into the wealth of local government experience and knowledge.

In discussion the following points were made:

13. There had been massive change in the last ten years on the operational side and that while there was still room for further progress it was on the policy development side that there was the greatest need for change;

14. It was important that the changed arrangements on the ground were reflected in partnership at HSC/LGP level;

15. Although the LACORS policy forum was making progress at officer level, the LGP and new HELA were at an early stage;
16. The local government role in policy-making tended to be reactive, with HSC policy developed by HSE and local government consulted at a late stage. It was important that local government involved in the early stages of policy development;
17. Local authorities increasingly have a leadership role to play, for example, on taking forward the health and well-being agenda. There was a growing sense within local government that they have much more to contribute to policy development and delivery;
18. It was sometimes difficult for councillors and officers to get health and safety onto LA agendas and this would remain a problem if this opportunity to involve councillors and LA officers in policy making was missed;
19. It might be a good idea for LGP members to attend HSC meetings to hear speakers and in LGP papers being sent to the HSC;
20. It was important to establish the principle that LAs have a role in developing policy. It was suggested that LAs should find the capacity to do so.

There was agreement that:

21. Local government should be able to put papers to HSC rather than simply responding to HSE papers;

LGP terms of reference and meeting format :

22. HSC/LGP meetings should not deal with detailed papers prepared by officers but with a small number of issues (no more than three) at a formative stage and probably involving a smaller number of commissioners;
23. It would be necessary to revisit the LGP terms of reference in light of the planned HSC/E governance changes and to consider how the policy-development aspect of partnership could work at officer level. BC suggested that he and GT and officials would need to reflect on how to take this forward. It was important that LGP members felt that they had a significant role to play and that LGP/HSC meeting were not just undertaking a tick box exercise;
24. Essential that the LGP facilitated and enabled top-level political dialogue between HSC and local government;
25. Agreed that papers on the HSC/E merger and on the development and communication of key LGP messages were suitable topics for the next meeting.

26. GT welcomed the positive tone of the meeting, the positive progress that had been made and paid tribute to BC who would have stepped down as HSC Chair before the next meeting.

Date and time of next meeting : 2pm on Tuesday 6 November 2007 (to be confirmed)