

MEETING BETWEEN HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION (HSC) AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PANEL (LGP)

Tuesday 15 May 2007, Rose Court, Globe room

Aim of meeting:

The continuing aim of these meetings is to facilitate regular political level discussion between HSC and local government.

The sole topic for this particular meeting is the proposed HSC/E governance changes and implications for the current HSC/LGP interface. In particular, this meeting can exchange views on how local government can best work with the new governing body in the future so that these views can be built into the decision making process.

A short paper on governance and HSC/LGP meetings is attached to aid discussion.

Format

Geoffrey Theobald is due to chair this meeting.

1330 LUNCH - HSC & LGP joining each other for lunch and informal discussion. After a reasonable time (approx 1415 but to be determined by the Chair of the mtg), people are encouraged to come together and share their views including an update from HSC's morning governance discussions.
1530 FINISH

Attendees

HSC:

Bill Callaghan, Sandy Blair, Robin Dahlberg, Danny Carrigan, Judith Donovan, Sayeed Khan, John Longworth, John Spanswick, Hugh Robertson and Elizabeth Snape (to be confirmed).

Note: To recognise LA concerns over parity of numbers, attendance by a smaller number of Commissioners eg four, could provide a better balance.

LGP:

Cllr Geoffrey Theobald (LACORS Chairman), Cllr Ann Lucas (LGA); Cllr Roland Domleo (LGA), Cllr Graham Brown (LGA) (LACORS to confirm latter's attendance).

Note: apologies from Caroline Seymour (LGA) & no representative from COSLA or WLGA.

Officials:

HSE: Geoffrey Podger, Justin McCracken, Jonathan Rees, Phil Scott (to be confirmed)

LACORS: Derek Allen, Mark du Val and Charles Loft

LAU/LACORS/HSC Secretariat May 2007

HSC/E governance and interaction/operation of the HSC/LGP forum

Governance

HSC/E views the LGP/HSC forum as vital to securing an improved partnership and which should:

- promote a strategic dialogue on local, central and devolved government issues that impact on health and safety regulatory functions.
- review the effectiveness and performance of the partnership between HSE and LAs.

The recent consultation on the proposed HSC/E merger showed:

- solid endorsement for the case for merger between HSC/E
- that developing the relationship between local government and the national authority is crucial.
- more detailed issues still to be addressed, including relationship with local authorities.
- The need to reflect the important role played by local authorities in the health and safety system e.g. explicitly allocating the appointment of one member following consultation with organisations representing local authorities.
- some enhancements may be needed to the provisions in Section 18 HSWA to reinforce the importance of co-operative working between the Executive and local authorities.
- On timing, at least a year away from launching the new unitary body – giving added importance to the effective continuation of LGP/HSC meetings.

We will also want to see the relationship between HSC and LAs, established under HSWA, preserved under the new governance structure. The LGP which currently provides a forum for HSC and elected members to discuss strategic policy decisions that impact on LA's regulatory responsibilities will continue to provide a direct route to the governing body of a merged HSC/E. This will ensure that the interests of LAs are reflected in the governing body's considerations when setting policy and strategy.

The governing body will be accountable to Ministers for overarching delivery of the strategy. This will require it to take a broader view that will go beyond the operational responsibilities of HSE. It will also be responsible for actively taking forward the partnership working with local Government. Agreement is therefore needed on how local government will contribute to the delivery of the health and safety system.

Effective relationships with stakeholders and partners will continue to ensure that the governing body can consider a wide spectrum of views in policy development and implementation. Particularly important will be the continued personal involvement and engagement of members of the governing body with the Local Government Panel.

LAs are showing great commitment to the partnership and HSC priorities. LAs are making a growing contribution to policy and programme governance, design and development. LAs' involvement in partnership working and their uptake of Fit3 priorities in service plans has been a great success. Delivery plans discussed at regional level then enable HSE and LAs to determine the best deployment of their joint resources to deliver the desired national outcomes, while taking account of local and regional priorities.

LGP/HSC meetings

The LGP and the HSC have now met twice (May and November 2006) and, as envisaged in the terms of reference, it's timely to review the effectiveness of meetings and identify improvements, both in the light of experience and in view of the proposed HSC/E governance changes.

We agree these meetings have not been as mutually beneficial as we had hoped though this is a developing forum and there have only been two meetings to date on which to judge. Moreover there is a much better relationship between HSC/E and Local Government.

The local government side identified the following difficulties from the LA point of view:

- Difficulty councillors have in getting to meetings organised around HSC timetable. Meeting straight after HSC meetings can be problematic, for example when HSC have guests
- Too much time devoted to overly-long detailed reports rather than broad discussion of topics.
- The meetings are too large
- The seating arrangements encourage confrontation rather than discussion.
- The meetings lacked an opportunity for informality.
- Too much time has to be devoted correcting misconceptions about local government. It sometimes seems as if LGP is present to receive instructions.

The local government side suggested the following improvements:

- LGP meetings with HSC should be an opportunity for local government to raise issues in an environment in which HSC will listen and vice versa.
- LGP meetings with HSC need clearer objectives/remit. The existing terms of reference do not fulfil their purpose.
- The LGP should influence HSC's thinking at a really high level at the policy development stage
- Strategic issues should be covered and put forward by either LGP or HSC.
- Some issues which had been worth discussing in the past were coordinating the timing of HSE and local government planning (budgets) raising smokefree issues, the retail enforcement pilot and joint warranting.
- What does HSC want from these meetings? Is it to ensure the LA delivery of HSC's remit works well and to understand how LAs work?
- It might be a good idea if the HSC and LGP took it in turns to host the meetings.

The joint-Chairs of HSC/LGP recently discussed how best to structure future meetings of the HSC/LGP, agreeing that:

- the aim of the Panel should continue to be to facilitate regular political level discussion
- for the May 2007 just one item to go on the agenda and that should be the proposed HSC/E Governance changes given the implications of the proposed changes on the relationship between Local Authorities and the new body and will provide LAs with the opportunity to discuss issues and concern in more detail. There could be a limited number of officials.
- agreed that HSC/E will explore reducing the numbers attending recognising LAs concerns over parity of numbers
- for future meetings agendas should be structured to accommodate a number of strategic issues for discussion - shorter and snappier discussion supported by brief papers where necessary
- effectiveness of the HSC/LG Panel meetings can be reviewed in due course
- willing to look at alternative models including alternating venues between HSC and LACORS and a more restricted attendance.