

MINISTER'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM - 2006 REVIEW

1. Purpose

To outline recommendations for reviewing the terms of reference, membership and processes of the Minister's Local Government Forum that have arisen in discussion between the Office for State/Local Government Relations (OSLGR) and the Local Government Association (LGA) in the annual review process of the Forum.

2. Background

On the establishment of the Forum, it was agreed that the Forum be reviewed at the end of its first year of operation. Accordingly, the first Forum review was undertaken in September 2003, with a report provided to the October 2003 Forum meeting. As part of this review, OSLGR approached all Forum members for their views on the operation and progress of the Forum in its first year of operation. Members agreed that the Forum should be reviewed annually to ensure its ongoing effectiveness, and that information would be provided to Cabinet outlining Forum progress each year.

The 2005 Forum review took place within the annual review of the schedule of priority actions appended to the State/Local Government Relations Agreement. Given this, it was considered more appropriate to undertake the review of the Forum as a separate activity in 2006.

3. Actions

After initial discussions within OSLGR, the LGA was approached for suggestions on possible improvements of the Forum. After further discussion between OSLGR and the LGA, it was agreed that several areas of the Forum could usefully be reviewed, while maintaining the current intent and direction of the Forum. These areas are:

3.1 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Minister's Local Government Forum, as endorsed by Cabinet in June 2002 are:

"To advise the Minister for Local Government, the Premier, the Government and the Local Government Association on matters referred to the Forum by the Minister that are

- (a) of significance to the State Government and the local government sector and that require a high level of co-operation between State and Local Government for their objectives to be achieved;*
- (b) at the interface between State and Local Government activities and service delivery that have significance across more than one portfolio;*
- (c) substantial, achievable and relevant to Local Government generally or at least a substantial part of it;*
- (d) only capable of being delivered with the support of both spheres of government."*

Discussion between OSLGR and the LGA agreed that these terms of reference are still, on the whole very relevant and applicable to the work the Forum undertakes. However, it is suggested that a minor change to the term of reference (b) be made, so that it reads:

(b) at the interface between State and Local Government activities and service delivery that have significance across more than one portfolio unless otherwise agreed by both parties.

This recognises that while it is usual for the Forum to focus on issues that are relevant to more than one portfolio within State Government, there are also instances in which the Forum advances issues that are essentially contained within only one portfolio. Current examples of this are Natural Resources Management (Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation) and Financial Guarantees (Department of Treasury and Finance).

3.2 Membership

It was also agreed that the current high level membership of the Forum represents State and Local Government well. However, it is suggested that the membership formally recognise the benefits that can be gained by inviting other Ministers and executive public sector representatives to attend Forum meetings in which items of interest to their portfolios are discussed as members.

3.3 Processes and Administration

When endorsing the Forum membership and terms of reference in July 2002, Cabinet and the LGA State Executive also endorsed a specific process by which items are placed on the Forum agenda. This process was a very formal method of identifying 'referrals' to the Forum. However, over the three years that the Forum has been in place, the method for identifying Forum agenda items has changed significantly. Ongoing discussions between OSLGR and LGA officers have become the primary mechanism for placing items on the Forum agenda. Once officer level agreement on topics has been reached, OSLGR and the LGA have taken responsibility for informing the Minister and the President respectively to gain their views on the proposed agenda item.

The LGA, OSLGR and other State agencies have found a broader approach to forming the Forum agenda to be of benefit. A less proscribed approach to placing items on the agenda enables both State and Local Government to draw the Forum's attention to items that may need further discussion by Forum members to progress. It has also been useful to place items on the agenda for which the Forum itself may not be responsible for enabling progress, but that have benefited from the profile issues gain by being considered by the Forum.

In view of this, Forum agenda items are now separated into two distinct categories – 'major agenda items' – issues for which the Forum is responsible for driving work and progress, and 'update reports' – which are items for which ongoing work is controlled by another agency or body, but information is provided to the Forum on the progress of this work. Update reports may appear on future agendas as major items, depending on the nature and status of work in progress.

Given the changes that have occurred as the work of the Forum has developed and progressed since its beginnings in 2002, it is suggested that this process be significantly reviewed.

The LGA also made some specific administrative requests regarding the organisation of Forum meetings. These included setting meeting dates well in advance of each meeting and a request that reports are not tabled at meetings.

3.4 Proposed Action

As the Forum terms of reference, membership and relevant processes were endorsed by Cabinet and the LGA State Executive in July 2002, it is considered appropriate that, if members agree on the proposed changes, a submission to Cabinet and the LGA State Executive be drafted to gain endorsement of the reviewed items. It would also be appropriate to inform Cabinet and the LGA State Executive of the Forum's work and achievements over the past twelve months, as required by the annual review process.

Forum members may also wish to consider any aspects of the Forum that could be improved, for which changes could be undertaken within this process.

4. Recommendations

That the Minister's Local Government Forum:

- 1. Consider any further aspects of the Forum that may be appropriately reviewed; and**
- 2. Endorse the drafting of a submission for Cabinet and the LGA State Executive to gain endorsement of the changes suggested above.**