

MINISTER'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM

INAUGURAL MEETING – 29 AUGUST 2002

BACKGROUND PAPER

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the key features of the Minister's Local Government Forum to assist participants from both the State and Local Government sectors to understand its purposes and priorities and to assist them to effectively participate in the early stages of the Forum.

The establishment of the Minister's Local Government Forum was an election promise of the State Government. The Minister for Local Government has been consulting closely with the President of the Local Government Association over the past months to develop an agreed basis for the operation of the Forum so that it can enjoy the support and confidence of both spheres of government.

On 1 July 2002, Cabinet approved the detailed arrangements for the establishment of the Minister's Local Government Forum, including its membership, terms of reference, method of operation and its relationship with the Local Government Association and State Government agencies.

The Forum will provide advice on key priorities where State and Local Government can work effectively together to achieve better outcomes for the community. It will help harness the resources of both spheres of government and coordinate efforts in key areas, and bring new and imaginative solutions to shared problems.

The work of the Forum will be supported through the establishment of a small independent reference group of prominent individuals who will be able to bring a range of perspectives to the work of the Forum.

Issues to be referred to the Forum will be agreed with the relevant Minister(s) and the LGA through the processes described below which have been endorsed by Cabinet and agreed by the Local Government Association. The Minister for Local Government has clearly stated that his expectation is for a limited number of items of shared importance to be referred to the Forum initially, to ensure that its work is results and outcomes oriented.

2 Terms of Reference

The broad Terms of Reference for the Forum approved by Cabinet, and agreed to by the Local Government Association, are as follows:

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

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

It is expected that the Forum will meet approximately four times per year for no more than half a day. Forum members may be invited to provide specialist input to working groups on topics before the Forum, but this will be by negotiation with individual members.

3 Arriving at agreed Agenda Items

Before an issue reaches the agenda of the Minister’s Forum it will have been through several steps.

- 3.1 The issue will be raised with the Minister for Local Government as an issue appropriate for consideration by the Forum. Issues may be brought to the attention of the Minister by Cabinet or a Cabinet Committee, by the Local Government Association, by another Minister or Ministers, or in other ways.
- 3.2 A small independent reference group is to be established, with the LGA to be consulted about membership. The proposed role of this group is to contribute to the process of generating agenda items for the Forum and to bring imaginative input to the topics considered by the Forum.
- 3.3 Suggested agenda items will be initially referred to senior officer representatives of the LGA and OLG, together with senior officers of relevant agencies. This process will support the Minister for Local Government in defining the issues for referral to the Forum by agreement with other Ministers and in consultation with the LGA.

- 3.4 To merit consideration for a referral to the Forum an issue must meet the criteria set in section 2 above "Terms of Reference". To determine whether an issue meets these criteria the Minister for Local Government will discuss the matter with the President of the LGA and the relevant Cabinet Ministers. If it does meet the criteria the issue will be refined as described in 3.3 above. At this point a referral for the Forum will be fully developed and agreed, initially between all the relevant Ministers.
- 3.5 The agreed referral will then be placed on the agenda of the Forum.

4 Resourcing referrals once on the Agenda

- 4.1 At the time of agreeing a referral it will be necessary to agree resources required to address it, to ensure that work to be done on the referral for the Forum is adequately serviced and appropriate skills brought to it. Discussions with the Ministers and the LGA on the referral will include discussions on resourcing of the project team.
- 4.2 A combination of support from the Forum support team and specialist input from relevant agencies and the Local Government sector will be utilised for this purpose. Money has been allocated in the 2002/03 State budget for support resources for the Forum in the Office of Local Government. The allocation will purchase administrative and some research support. For each specific referral these resources will require supplementation with specialists from relevant agencies and/or Local Government. A combined project team will be commissioned for each referral in this way.
- 4.3 Using the referral as the central tool for arriving at Forum agenda items will:
- provide a mechanism for securing an understanding between relevant Ministers and the LGA on the scope of issues to be addressed with Local Government;
 - allow issues to be defined at a strategic level, across all relevant agencies;
 - enable the impact of issues on Local Government relations to receive proper consideration;
 - provide a mechanism to overcome some of the differences in the use of language between State and Local Government that frequently produce misunderstanding;
 - ensure the issues are rigorously defined before work is undertaken to seek potential solutions;
 - ensure work towards resolving issues is clearly targeted;
 - provide clear focus for Forum discussions.

5 Forum deliberations

- 5.1 Once an issue has been agreed it will be placed on the Forum agenda for preliminary discussion. At that time the agreement on the referral will also be advised to the State Executive of the LGA and the relevant Cabinet Committee for information.
- 5.2 At its initial consideration of the referral the Forum will be asked to review and guide the approach proposed to be taken to the referral, highlighting important considerations from both State and Local Government perspectives before detailed work towards proposed solutions is undertaken.
- 5.3 The advice from the Forum will inform the work of the referral project team, which will prepare potential recommendations for the consideration of the Forum. On completion of its task, the project team's report and recommendations will be considered by the Forum, which, when satisfied with the nature of the recommendations, will forward them to the Minister for Local Government and the President of the Local Government Association.
- 5.4 Any outcomes of the Forum which result in proposed decisions in relation to funding, legislation or formal intergovernmental agreements will not be managed by the Forum but through the normal process for decision making.
- 5.5 The Forum can be expected to meet approximately four times a year. Its work will be directed to broadening and deepening the understandings brought to issues referred to it, to guide the work done on the referrals and to ensure the acceptability and practicality of solutions developed for its consideration as recommendations. Depending on the complexity of the issues a referral may be considered only twice by the Forum as a group, at the start and at the conclusion of the work done for the Forum, or could require more than two discussions.