

Office of the Prime Minister

Department for Local Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2008 marked the 15th anniversary of local government in Malta. On the experience of past fifteen years it was deemed necessary to review the local government legislation as well as current policies and processes in order to address present and future needs. The major highlight with respect to local government during 2008 was the launch of the Local Government Reform process that consisted of a consultation process involving all stakeholders. The consultation process included meetings with all the 68 Local Councils, government departments, authorities and agencies, non government organizations, as well as other stakeholders, including the general public. The end of the consultation process was marked by a week long series of activities that involved both Council members as well as citizen participation. Use of a website, e-mail address, freephone as well as mail shot in all households was used to reach all citizens. These measures also helped in putting local government high on the national agenda.

As a result of the consultation process, it was deemed necessary to implement certain measures without the need to await the finalization of the reform process. The new policies implemented during 2008 were: Twinning Policy, Vacant Sites Policy and Publication of Tenders Policy.

Central government direct and indirect financing to Local Councils (including the allocation of government and IPSL workers) for financial year 2008/09 was of €30.9m (Lm13.26m). Central government also assisted both the Local Councils Association (LCA) and the Association of Local Council Executive Secretaries (ASKLM), the former with a financial allocation of EUR 69,882 and the latter with an annual financial allocation of EUR 9,318. In addition, the LCA is provided also with the services of a former PBS worker and a Department for Local Government (DLG) employee, whereas a public officer was detailed with the LCA in the position of Committee of the Regions liaison officer.

In 2008 the DLG embarked also on an intensive training programme for Council member and staff, as well as DLG staff. A training programme for newly elected Councillors was organised in conjunction with the LCA, whereas training was also organised for DLG and Council staff on data protection, Customer Relations and the proper use of Maltese in Council publications.

New initiatives during 2008 included the introduction of waste separation from households with government assistance for the payment of the additional waste separation trips, the introduction of a new department website that would also include links to all Local Council websites, assistance through the MEUSAC Funding Unit to Local Councils in the preparation and submission of EU project proposals, the introduction of a Cultural Events Scheme whereby successful Councils would be given financial grant to finance part of the expenses, as well as the facilitation to Councils to promote on a weekly basis in a local newspaper past and future events organised by them within their localities.

The envisaged actions for 2009 are: drastic amendments to the local government legislation, the introduction of a Local Government Policy, the restructuring of the DLG, a new funding mechanism to Local Councils, the strengthening of resources within DLG for more efficient monitoring of Local Council functions, and the strengthening of cooperation between central government authorities and local government.

Department for Local Government

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The year 2008 marked the 15th anniversary of local government in Malta. On the experience of past fifteen years it was deemed necessary to review both the local government legislative framework as well as the current processes in order to address present and future needs. The major highlight with respect to local government during 2008, therefore, was the launch of the local government reform process that consisted of a consultation process involving all stakeholders.

The local government reform process was launched on 23 May 2008 by means of a Press Conference by the Prime Minister, attended by Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Executive Secretaries. In his speech, the Prime Minister highlighted several local government issues that needed to be addressed in the reform process, including a coordinated approach between central and local government authorities, sustainable development considerations in all local policies, transparency and accountability at local level, good governance, environmental considerations, citizen education and discipline, ongoing training for elected Local Councillors, Executive Secretaries and Council staff, maximization of EU membership.

The Prime Minister also made several questions to be addressed during the local government reform public consultation process. These were:

- How can the necessary balance between economic, social and environmental development be developed at local level;
- How can we ensure that today's development at local level will not prejudice our future children;
- What long term decisions are we making;
- How are we to ensure the highest standards of ethical behaviour by Mayors and Councillors;
- Are the current structures adequate both for today's and tomorrow's needs;
- What are our strengths in order to build on them;
- Where do we need to change; what kind of training and preparation do local elected councillors have;
- How can Councils work together in order to obtain better results;

- How can there be better coordination between central government and local government;
- What is our local government vision for 2015.

A small Reform Unit was also set up to attend all consultation meetings, take notes and compile all comments and suggestions received. The Reform Unit also took note of the complaints received and took action to forward the complaints to the competent authorities, giving feedback to the complainant. At the end of the consultation process, a report comprising all the recommendations received.

INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

The local government reform process started off with the launch of a website <http://www.kunsillilokali2015.gov.mt>, freephone and e-mail facilities so that the general public would be in a position to give their comments and suggestions. A new logo was also launched to signify government's vision for the Local Government Reform in line with its stated objective to achieve excellence in several areas by 2015. A questionnaire was later on posted to all households, which resulted in around 3,000 written proposals. These measures also helped in putting local government high on the national agenda.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The first phase of consultations was held with Local Council members, Executive Secretaries and staff. Meetings were held with in all the 68 Local Councils in Malta and Gozo, where all Council members, Executive Secretaries and staff had the opportunity to give their recommendations for improving the functions and operations of local government.

The second phase consisted of a series of consultation with government agencies, corporations and authorities. These included the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA), Enemalta, Water Services Corporation), non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as people from various sectors of society (such as people in old homes and school children). In addition, consultations were also held with the general public. Consultation meetings were held in Rabat (Malta), Marsaskala and Marsalforn (Gozo), where the public participated fully and had the opportunity to give their comments and recommendations. The consultation process came to a close in November 2008.

All the comments and recommendations were recorded by the Reform Unit and compiled for eventual evaluation.

SEMINAR ON THE REFORM OF THE LOCAL ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM (LES)

A one day seminar was organised jointly between the Parliamentary Secretariat for Public Dialogue and Information and the DLG in Gozo for local enforcement system (LES) stakeholders. These included: Chairmen of LES Joint Committees, Authorised Officers, Local Tribunal Registrars, Local Prosecutors, Local Warden Agencies, Members of the Board of Petitions, LES software maintenance providers, the General Workers Union (representing local wardens), the Local Councils Association and representatives from the Police and Malta Transport Authority. During this seminar, 3 workshops were held, each discussing a different theme, and the report of each workshop was presented at the close of the seminar in the presence of the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Information.

ACTIVITIES TO MARK THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MALTA

In order to bring to an end the local government consultation process as well as in order to mark the fifteen years of local government in Malta, a steering committee was set up to plan a one week activities. The steering committee, chaired by the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, comprised also representatives from the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Consultation and Information, the DLG, and the Local Councils Association. The programme of activities, held in the first week of December, consisted of: planting of trees in Malta and in Gozo by all the Mayors, a roundtable discussion of key local government stakeholders on the subject of The Future of Local Government in Malta, a reception hosted by the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Consultation and Information to former Councillors and Executive Secretaries, blood donation by Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Councillors, activities organised jointly between several Local Councils and Primary Schools, courtesy visit by the Executive Committees of the LCA and ASKLM to the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Consultation and Information, a visit by the Prime Minister to the offices of the DLG, opening of a Gozo talent exhibition and public discussion in Gozo.

The activities came to an end with a march by all Council members from Floriana to St John's Co-Cathedral. The march was led by the band of the Armed Forces of Malta. A solemn mass celebrated by His Excellency the Archbishop of Malta was held at the Co-Cathedral, which was followed by a reception at the Auberge de Castille, hosted by the Prime Minister.

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NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES

As a result of the consultation process, it was deemed necessary to implement certain measures without the need to await the finalization of the reform process. The new policies implemented during 2008 were the following.

TWINNING POLICY

Following an intensive consultation process with key stakeholders, foremost being the LCA, a new Twinning Policy was issued in June 2008. This new policy provides clear guidelines, such as definitions as well as procedural modalities with respect to Twinning objectives, the submission of a Twinning Work Plan at the start of the arrangement and the submission of an annual report, as well as financial obligations.

VACANT SITES POLICY

A new policy document was issued during 2008 (substituting the original one) that establishes the action to be taken by Local Councils in order to eliminate inconveniences caused by vacant sites. The policy document was issued after discussions were held with key stakeholders, including the Parliamentary Secretariat for Public Consultation and Information, MEPA and the LCA. The new policy guidelines are based on the need to address a serious environmental issue that is also a threat to the health and safety of citizens. The policy document addresses the issues of: cleanliness of the vacant sites, the specifications for the erection and alignment of a wall, and other specifications.

PUBLICATION OF TENDERS POLICY

In September 2008 a new policy was established whereby in line with the basic competition rules, Local Councils were instructed to forward all calls for tenders and quotations for publication in a local daily newspaper chosen by the Department. The newspaper was the one that offered the most advantageous package chosen following a call for quotations.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

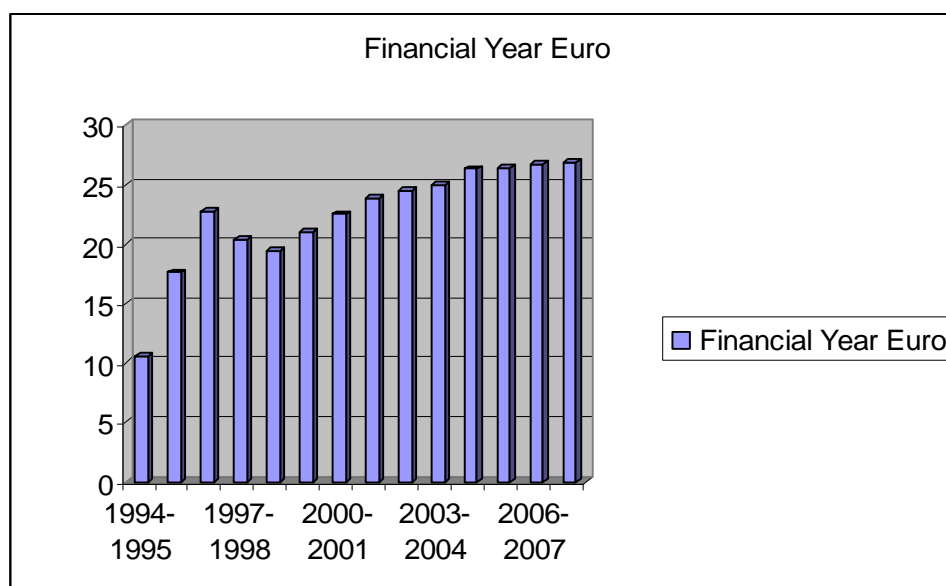
LOCAL COUNCIL FINANCING

The central government financial allocation to Local Councils for financial year 2008/2009 amounts to EUR 28.01 million. Central government also assists local councils through the assignment of IPSL workers (currently amounting to 136 workers) as well as Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs workers (amounting to 40 workers) to all Malta Councils as well as 34 public officials (formerly detailed with Water Services Corporation in Gozo) assigned to Gozo Local Councils, for a total of 210 workers. The salaries of these workers amount to approximately EUR 2.88 million. Thus, central government's financial contribution to local government, both direct and indirect funds amount to EUR 30.89 million.

The Department for Local Government (DLG) provides assistance to the Local Councils Association (LCA) and to the Association of Local Council Executive Secretaries (ASKLM) as part of government's commitment to assist both associations. The LCA is given an annual financial allocation of EUR 69,882 whereas the ASKLM is given an annual financial allocation of EUR 9,318. In addition, the LCA is provided with the services of a former PBS worker and a DLG worker, whereas a public officer has been detailed with the LCA in the position of Committee of the Regions liaison officer. The DLG also sponsored part of the expenses incurred by the LCA for its participation during the European Open Days for the amount of EUR 2,500. Central government has, therefore, provided indirect financial assistance to the LCA for the amount of EUR 44,500. Central government's assistance to the both associations in both direct and indirect financial allocation amounts to approximately EUR 123,700. Thus, the total amount of direct and indirect central government funding for the functions and operations of local government is of approximately EUR 31.01 million.

The DLG is responsible for the allocation of central government's subvention to councils. The table below illustrates the direct and indirect financial allocation to Local Councils since the setting up of Local Councils in 1994.

Direct and Indirect Financial Allocation to Local Councils by central govt. 1994 – 2008								
Financial Year	Direct Financial Allocation (in million)		Salaries of Government employees and IPSL workers seconded with Local Councils (in million)		Funds for Special Needs 1994-2000 (in million)		Total funds from central Government (in million)	
	Lm	Euro	Lm	Euro	Lm	Euro	Lm	Euro
1994-1995	4.50	10.48	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.07	4.53	10.55
1995-1996	6.30	14.68	0.00	0.00	1.27	2.96	7.57	17.63
1996-1997	7.25	16.89	0.00	0.00	2.50	5.82	9.75	22.71
1997-1998	6.25	14.56	0.00	0.00	2.50	5.82	8.75	20.38
1998-1999	5.83	13.58	0.00	0.00	2.50	5.82	8.33	19.40
1999-2000	6.50	15.14	0.00	0.00	2.50	5.82	9.00	20.96
2000-2001	9.67	22.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.67	22.53
2001-2002	10.24	23.85	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.24	23.85
2002-2003	10.54	24.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.54	24.55
2003-2004	10.70	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.70	24.93
2004-2005	10.69	24.91	0.60	1.40	0.00	0.00	11.30	26.33
2005-2006	10.20	23.76	1.14	2.66	0.00	0.00	11.34	26.42
2006-2007	10.25	23.88	1.20	2.80	0.00	0.00	11.45	26.67
2007-2008	10.27	23.93	1.24	2.88	0.00	0.00	11.51	26.81
2008-2009	12.02	28.01	1.24	2.88	0.00	0.00	13.26	30.89
Total	131.23	305.69	4.18	12.61	11.30	26.32	147.94	344.61



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HUMAN RESOURCES – MAJOR ACTIVITIES

TRAINING AND SPONSORSHIP OF DLG EMPLOYEES

During 2008, DLG employees were given training in specific areas. These included training in Customer Relations, Data Protection and training on Proper Use of the Maltese Language in Official Documentation. This training was organised in collaboration with the Staff Development Organisation (SDO), the Operations and Programme Implementation Directorate within the Office of the Prime Minister and the *Kunsill Nazzjonali ta' l-Ilsien Malti* (National Council for the Maltese Language), respectively.

The DLG also benefited from work placement of students undergoing tertiary education. During 2008 a University of Malta student reading for a BA (Hons) in Social Policy and a French language student carried out a work placement at the department for a number of weeks.

In line with the DLG's commitment towards developing human capital through further education, during this period two DLG employees successfully terminated their tertiary education, one in Bachelor of Arts (Hons) studies from the University of Malta and another in Master of Science (Human & Personal Development) from the University of Leicester.

TRAINING FOR LOCAL COUNCILLORS

In October and November the DLG organised a structured training programme for Local Councillors who were elected during the 2008 Local Elections. The course was organised both in Malta and in Gozo and a total of 30 Councillors participated in both courses. Several Mayors also participated in this training programme. The modules included: The Local Councils Act including subsidiary legislation on financial and audit regulations and the Standing Orders, the Role of the Local Councillor, as well as interpersonal skills such as Teamwork and Leadership skills. A certificate of attendance was presented to participants by the Parliamentary Secretary Dr Chris Said at the end of the training programme.

TRAINING FOR LOCAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES

During the year under review, the DLG organised two training seminars for Local Council Executive Secretaries. These were: Seminar on Data Protection (organised in collaboration with the Operations and Programme Implementation Directorate within the Office of the Prime Minister) and another seminar on

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Proper Use of the Maltese Language in Official Documentation organised in collaboration with the National Council for the Maltese Language.

TRAINING FOR LOCAL COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

For the first time ever, the DLG also embarked on training for Local Council employees in its endeavour to strengthen and improve the competences of employees at local government level. A training course on Customer Relations was organised for Council employees dealing with customer care. Participation at this course was high. In fact, around 70 Council employees (representing 50% of all Council employees) participated in this highly interactive course facilitated by trainers provided by the SDO. A certificate of attendance was presented to participants at the end of the training programme.

LOCAL DEVOLUTION ACTIVITIES

DELEGATION OF LOCAL ENFORCEMENT

During 2008, the local enforcement system (LES) was extended to all localities within Malta and Gozo. This was done following extensive discussions between all parties that finally led to the Marsa, Birzebbuga and Gudja Local Councils accepting the delegation of local enforcement (that is, the delegation of local enforcement through Local Wardens).

DEVOLUTION OF PUBLIC PROPERTY

During 2008, the Devolution Unit with the DLG was instrumental in the realization of the formal agreements for the devolution of government owned property to eight Local Councils. The devolution agreements were the following: playing field and recreational area to the Santa Lucija Local Council, playing field, community hall and civic centre to the Fontana Local Council, site for administrative offices to the Msida Local Council, site for administrative offices, playground, public garden and parking space to the Hamrun Local Council, recreational area to the Floriana Local Council, public garden to the Birgu Local Council, premises to be used as a cultural centre to the Zejtun Local Council, and public convenience to the Santa Venera Local Council.

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DEVOLUTION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The year under review also saw the addition of devolution of public libraries to Local Councils. During 2008, 3 more Councils undertook to assume the devolution of administration of branch libraries. These were the Pembroke, Kalkara and Tarxien Local Councils. Today, there are 47 Councils that have assumed this responsibility of the administration of local libraries (6 Regional Libraries and 41 Branch Libraries).

LOCAL ENFORCEMENT

LOCAL ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM (LES)

All the 68 Local Councils in Malta and Gozo now form part of the local enforcement system (LES). The DLG is responsible to oversee that the system works as flawlessly as possible. As part of its oversight, the department offers a customer care service with respect to LES issues. As part of the local government reform process, the LES system is also under review. Proposals have been put forward by the DLG to regulate the Local Tribunal sittings, including the establishing of clear roles and responsibilities of the Authorised Officer and Tribunal Registrar. An online payment service of contraventions is also available on the following webpage <http://www.gov.mt/frame.asp?l=1&url=http://www.les.gov.mt>

BOARD OF PETITIONS

The introduction of the Petitions Board in January 2006 has been instrumental in easing citizen frustrations brought about by erroneous issue of notices of contraventions. In addition, the Board of Petitions is also empowered to waive contraventions when it is satisfied that it should do so on humanitarian grounds. Since its inception till end of November 2008, the Registry, Board of Petitions (which is administered by the DLG) has received 35,203 petitions, ie an average of 977 petitions per month. In view of the ever increasing volume of work as well as the addition of staff within the Registry, during 2008 office space was made available on one floor and additional IT and other office furniture bought. This was made possible in view of cost cutting measures adopted by the DLG in other items of expenditure.

The table below gives a breakdown of petitions received and their status as at end of year 2008.

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	Status	2006	2007	2008	Total	% of Petitions considered
1	Accepted	4,001	5,361	2,100	11,462	53.8%
2	Partially accepted	257	51	3	311	1.5%
3	Refused	2,617	3,620	2,997	9,234	43.4%
4	Abstained	160	23	12	195	0.9%
5	Cancelled / others	16	21	54	91	0.4%
6	Decided Petitions	7,051	9,076	5,166	21,293	100%
						% of Petitions Received
6	Decided Petitions	7,051	9,076	5,166	21,293	60%
7	Undecided petitions	815	2,841	10,254	13,910	40%
8	Petitions Received	7,866	11,917	15,420	35,203	100%

MONITORING OF LOCAL COUNCILS

MONITORING OF LOCAL COUNCILS AND ACTION TAKEN

The Monitoring Unit with the DLG, notwithstanding the lack of resources, continued with its efforts to monitor local councils' functions and operations, in particular in order to ensure the submission of statutory documents, such as the Annual Budget, the Business Plan and the Quarterly Financial Reports. The Monitoring Unit also provides advice on the proper submission of financial estimates as well as on other financial queries.

Monitoring is done by scrutinising Council minutes of meetings, Schedule of Payments, as well as investigating allegations of irregularities by council members or council employees. As a result of investigations carried out during 2008, several Councils had payments withheld from their financial allocation until statutory documents were submitted. In addition, punitive measures were taken against several Councils for making illegal donations, through deductions from their financial allocation.

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Investigations carried out by the department with respect to familiar disclosure and pecuniary interest led to both cases being forwarded to the Police for further investigation and eventual prosecution. In another case, the department gave its recommendation to the minister for the approval of dismissal of a Council employee and in another two occasions interim audits were carried out to establish whether there were financial irregularities by council employees.

The Monitoring Unit also liaises closely with the National Audit Office, in particular with respect to action to be taken following the receipt of the Audit Reports and the replies by the Council to the local government auditors' Management Letter.

On the basis of its operational experience, the Monitoring Unit has also submitted extensive proposals with respect to financial reporting and budgeting as part of the local government reform process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW BUDGET AND QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT TEMPLATES

The Monitoring Unit has also carried out a review of existing Budget and Quarterly Financial Report templates, both templates being obligatory in terms of the Local Councils Financial Procedures. These templates had never been amended since their inclusion in the procedures in 1996, and the changes proposed by the Department are intended to render them in line with current practices, in particular with a view to cater for the accrual accounting system that is operated by Local Councils. The proposals were also made following extensive consultation with the National Audit Office and the Association of Local Council Executive Secretaries.

LOCAL COUNCIL APPRAISAL

EFFICIENCY REPORTS

The Department's Field Services Unit (FSU) carried out inspections in all localities in Malta and Gozo with respect to the statutory functions of road maintenance, street sweeping, street cleaning, upkeep of public conveniences, upkeep and maintenance of gardens, road signs and markings, and footways.

These inspections were compiled in 3 Efficiency Reports that were tabled in the House of Representatives. The reports included also a comparative study with the inspection reports carried out during the previous year. Whilst notable improvements were noted in several Councils, the same could not be reported for other Councils where the service efficiency did not improve. In the case of those Councils that no marked

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improvement was noted, meetings were held between DLG officials and the Council to identify the major difficulties and offer assistance.

UPDATING OF LOCAL COUNCILS ASSET INVENTORY

The Department also carried out field surveys with respect to updating the local government assets in the localities of Hamrun, Iklin, Kalkara, Kirkop, Lija, Luqa, Marsa, Qormi, Floriana, Siggiewi, Birzebbugia, Bormla, Birkirkara, Santa Venera, Dingli, San Pawl il-Bahar, Mellieha, Msida, Zabbar, Marsaxlokk, Naxxar, Mellieha, Fontana, Xewkija, Nadur, Qala, San Lawrenz, Xaghra (G), and Zebbug (G). This data is required as part of the funding formula established in the Tenth Schedule to the Local Councils Act.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

LEGAL NOTICES

During 2008, the Legal Section of the DLG was responsible for the preparation, vetting and publication of eleven (11) local government legal notices. These legal notices regulate: the inclusion of the Smart City as a zone excluded from the jurisdiction of local councils, amendments to the coat-of-arms of the Floriana locality, the coming into force of the power of Mayors to officiate during civil marriages, the inclusion of an NGO as an organization that can receive donations from Local Councils, the extension of the term of office of the current Local Councils Association executive body by one year, the publication of public property devolved to 8 Local Councils, the delegation of local enforcement to the Gudja, Marsa and Birzebbuga Local Councils (whereby all the 68 Local Councils now have been delegated local enforcement), and the dissolution of Mtarfa Local Council following official notice for persistent breaches of the Local Councils Act.

APPROVAL OF NEW BYE-LAWS

In 2008, 3 Councils submitted proposals for Bye-Laws that were approved by the minister. These were the following: the *Xatt is-Sajjieda* (San Giljan Local Council) Bye-Laws 2008 that regulate access to and the placement of boats on *Xatt is-Sajjieda* under conditions imposed by the Council; the Beverages in Glass Containers and Consumption of Alcohol in Public Places (San Giljan Local Council) Bye-Laws 2008 that regulate the carrying and consumption of alcohol in public places as well as scheduling the streets within San Giljan wherein no alcohol or beverages in glass containers shall be consumed; and the Use of Facilities (Santa Lucija Local Council) Bye-Laws 2008 that regulate the use of the 5-a-side football pitch

or the display, placement or fixing of any advertisement on any wall or equipment in the said pitch which is under the responsibility of the Santa Lucija Local Council.

NEW INITIATIVES

WASTE SEPARATION FROM HOUSEHOLDS

In line with central government's national waste strategy, all the Local Councils have, since May 2008, started participating in the waste separation strategy. All Councils have contributed towards the distribution of free waste separation (grey) bags. In addition, they also undertook to include an additional waste collection service on Tuesdays for separated waste. Following discussions between the Ministry of Finance, the LCA, GRTU and the DLG, central government undertook to make good for the cost of the additional waste collection service until a new contract document for both organic and separated waste is issued.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEBSITE

On the initiative of the Parliamentary Secretariat for Public Consultation and Information, the DLG was involved in the coordination of the Local Government website that will also include links to all Local Councils' sub-websites. The general website, owned by the DLG, will be launched in January 2009.

ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL COUNCILS BY MEUSAC

In August 2008, the DLG issued a circular to all Councils informing them that the Funding Unit within MEUSAC (the Malta-EU Steering Action Committee) would be assisting those Councils that wished to avail themselves of EU programmes not forming part of the ERDF or the ESF. This service to Local Councils is free of charge.

FACILITY TO LOCAL COUNCILS FOR FREE ADVERTISING

In October 2008, the Department informed all Councils that agreement was made with a local newspaper to dedicate a full page to advertise local council activities. This gave an excellent opportunity to all Local Councils to advertise any forthcoming local events or past events organised by them.

CULTURAL EVENTS SCHEME

In December 2008, the DLG issued a circular to all Councils informing them of the launch of a new scheme to promote cultural events within their localities. The circular was accompanied by guidance notes (including eligibility criteria) and an application form. This scheme is one of the measures undertaken by central government for the development of "sustainable localities" by giving an incentive to those Councils that propose initiatives aiming at improving their localities' cultural heritage whilst promoting it to

domestic and foreign visitors alike. All applications for grant assistance under this scheme will be assessed by an independent evaluation board. A fund of €93000 has been allocated for this scheme.

SCHEME FOR ENERGY SAVING PROJECTS BY LOCAL COUNCILS

In December 2008 another scheme was launched to all Councils. This scheme is aimed at giving an incentive to those Councils that propose a feasible energy saving scheme. The scheme also signifies central government's commitment in effectively supporting such initiatives. The circular was accompanied by guidance notes and application form. All applications for grant assistance under this scheme will be assessed by an independent evaluation board and each successful Council would be eligible for financial assistance of a maximum of €10,000. The fund allocated for this scheme is of €150,000.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

EUROPEAN UNION COMMITMENTS

URBACT Programme

The DLG is the national representative on the URBACT Programme (an EU programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund). This programme aims to foster the exchange of experience among European cities and the capitalisation and dissemination of knowledge on sustainable urban development related issues. The current programme (URBACT II) is aimed at improving the effectiveness of sustainable integrated urban development in Europe with a view to implementing the European Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy (that addresses the issues of competitiveness, growth and jobs).

Participation at National Level

On a local level, the DLG is a partner in the EU project *Promoting Equal Opportunities through Empowerment* that is led by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE). The objectives of the project are to reach out to the inactive segment of the Maltese population, and to effectively make use of role models. The input of the Department was to assist the NCPE in the dissemination of information to all Councils on activities that promote gender mainstreaming and seminars during which examples of good practice were given.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITMENTS

Steering Committee for Local and Regional Democracy

As member in the Steering Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR), the director participated in the plenary session held between 2 and 4 June 2008 wherein several reports prepared by the sub committees were discussed, including reports on regionalisation in Europe, a draft additional protocol

to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, reports of activities by Member States on democratic participation at local level, public ethics at local level, trans-frontier cooperation, the Council of Europe (CoE) strategy for innovation and good governance at local level, the European Democracy Week (held during the month of October in all CoE Member States, and preparatory work for the Ministerial Conference due in October/November 2009.

ENVISAGED ACTIONS IN 2009

The following are the envisaged actions during 2009:

- Drastic amendments to the Local Councils Act and subsidiary legislation as a result of the local government reform process
- The introduction of a Local Government Policy that would provide a policy framework, including guidelines
- The restructuring of the Department for Local Government to address the newly devolved local government functions and operations resulting from the local government reform
- A new funding mechanism for Local Councils that would be less cumbersome and more transparent as well as addressing specific locality characteristics or concerns
- Strengthening of existing resources within the DLG for more efficient monitoring of local council activities
- Strengthening of cooperation between ministries, government departments and central authorities with local government authorities.

Natalino Attard
Director (Local Government)