

Lonan Parish

Laxey Village

Maughold Parish

# **Garff Joint Initiative**

## **A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE ISLE OF MAN**

**Date**

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## **Introduction**

This report has been produced as a response to the Department of Local Government and the Environment (DOLGE) report in to the effectiveness of the present Local Government structure on the island and the island's supervisory powers. (November 2004).

This report has been compiled by the Commissioners for the three local authorities which constitute the Sheading of Garff, namely Laxey Village, and the Parishes of Lonan and Maughold and as such, has the endorsement of the three boards. The belief of the Commissioners is that the reform proposals contained within this report constitute a viable and practical way forward. The aim of the report is to ensure the effectiveness of Local Government in the rural Sheading of Garff thereby protecting ancient parish boundaries whilst delivering cost effective and high quality services as desired by our ratepayers and the Isle of Man Government.

The report contains many proposals about how reforms in Local Government might be tackled with reasons. **It is not proposed as a definitive document but is intended to stimulate realistic discussions between Government and the Local Authorities.**

## **Executive Summary**

The document is intended to stimulate realistic discussions between central government and the local authorities on the subject of Local Government Reform. The document has been compiled jointly by Laxey Village, Lonan and Maughold Parish Commissioners, who together comprise the Sheading of Garff.

### **The findings are:**

1. That neighbouring local authorities should be encouraged by government to provide joint services whenever it is in the best interests of the ratepayer and the environment to do so.
2. Some existing functions such as waste collection services, street cleaning and litter collection and responses to strategic reports can be considered for joint service provision in Garff.
3. Local authorities within Garff are keen to take on enhanced functions these include introducing recycling collections, hedgerow maintenance, warden provision, minor road repairs, library and tourist information provision. Many of these are likely to be best provided as a joint service.
4. Other services are felt currently to be best carried out by individual local authorities. These include administration, civic hospitality, management of open spaces and recreation areas and dealing with initial planning applications.
5. Individual local authorities should be able to work with any local authorities to provide services, such as sheltered housing, where it is shown to be the best way to meet the needs of the ratepayers of that local authority.
6. Central government should have control of all Local Authority Housing, Building Control and swimming pool management.
7. Where local authorities such as those in Garff come together to provide a number of joint services a new committee may be set up to administer the service. The document suggests ways in which this might operate.
8. The three local authorities in Garff are willing, where a benefit exists to all, to join together to provide a specific service more cost effectively and efficiently to Garff ratepayers. A joint waste collection commences in April 2005. They are also willing to take on enhanced functions either singularly or together that will provide a better quality of life for the Garff residents. There is no opposition to raising funding to provide additional services where they are of benefit to the ratepayers of Garff.

**Laxey, Lonan and Maughold Commissioners are not resistant to change but ask that changes in structure and functions be allowed to evolve gradually through negotiation and consensus in the forthcoming years and be introduced for the benefit of the Garff ratepayer and our communities.**

## 1) Local Government Reform - background

The Minister for Local Government and the Environment, the Honourable John Rimmington MHK presented Local Authorities with his department's proposals for Local Government Reform at Tynwald on the 3rd November 2004. A number of meetings were then held at Ramsey, Peel, Castletown, and Douglas where there was overwhelming opposition to the proposals, principally from the rural parishes which would disappear under the 4+1 regional authorities proposed by the minister.

The issue of Local Government Reform had previously been reported upon in the 'Time for Change' report of 1992-4 and the 'Securing a Future' report of 1997. In this latter report the main findings were **'that local government must be reformed to have a future'** and **'that there is an acceptance by the majority of Local authorities that any reform of Local Government should retain a separate identity between town and country interests.'**

The recommendations made by the 1997 report were that there should be **13 new local authorities** made up of;

- One Municipal Authority - Douglas.
- Five Town & District Authorities - Ramsey, Onchan, Castletown, Peel and Bradda.
- Seven Sheading Authorities - Braddan, Ayre, Michael, Garff, Glenfaba, Malew & Santon, and Rushen.

The Department in 1997 believed reform should be based on **no more than 13 Local Authorities** which would secure rural and urban identities, enabling ancient parish boundaries to be protected and enhance the influence, effectiveness and efficiency of local authorities. The report also recommended central government support for areas of public housing, highways and drainage.

Only one of the recommendations from the 1997 report has been acted upon, namely that there should be a General Local Authority election, which came into force in April 2004.

The three local authorities within the Sheading of Garff, namely, Lonan, Laxey and Maughold have held discussions over a number of years on the subject of Local Government reform as and when it has been raised by DOLGE.

## 2) Towards a Garff Initiative

Discussions between the three Garff Local Authorities have intensified over the last year mainly on the insistence of the previous Minister the Honourable Mrs Pamela Crowe MLC that waste collection should be carried out by 4 + 1 waste authorities, on similar lines to the present 4+1 regional authorities proposed by the current Minister.

The Department highlighted the variation in the cost of refuse collection throughout the island and proposed that some centralisation (4+1) would produce savings to local authorities and hence the rate payer. The issue of waste collection was therefore the item which was top of the agenda and the one which Garff Authorities came together to discuss in 2004.

Following discussions with neighbouring larger Authorities it became clear that both the proposed 'Northern Authority' and 'Eastern Authority' may be 'unable to cope' with additional waste collections and the savings were not as high as had been suggested. It is our belief that Onchan Village Commissioners may be unable to offer a service to Laxey and Lonan and that Ramsey may be unable to offer a service to Maughold.

As a result the Garff Authorities agreed to put to tender the waste collection for Garff when the contract next came up for renewal in April 2005. The outcome from these discussions is that tenders for Garff Refuse collections have been submitted and a **single contractor will be used from April 2005 for a period of three years on an agreed price contract.** Indeed it is a price which is lower than that indicated by the neighbouring authorities who provide their own waste collection services.

**The individual Boards believes this will be the most cost effective solution to waste collection and will also retain a high level of service to the ratepayer.**

**The principle illustrated here is that neighbouring Local Authorities should be encouraged to provide joint services with one or more neighbouring authorities where it is in all their best interests to do so. This should be seen as an enhancing the functions of local Authorities not a diminution.**

### 3) **A review of some other services which might be delivered through a Garff Initiative**

There are other services, (some desired by Government and others by the Garff ratepayers) which could possibly be delivered more effectively and efficiently jointly, as a Garff Initiative. However, it must be remembered that **it may not always be the case that better terms and conditions can be negotiated as Garff rather than as individual Local Authorities** and in those instances individual parishes may then choose to carry out a service separately.

The Garff Committee would meet monthly and when requested to by the respective Boards would actively consider joint provision of further services, from the following list of local authority responsibilities:

- Refuse Collection and Disposal,
- Administration,
- Provision of a Civic Amenity Site,
- Recreation and Leisure Facilities,
- Street Lighting,
- Library Provision/Information Technology Centre
- Public Toilets,
- Beach cleaning,
- Street cleaning and Hedge cutting,
- Strategic Planning Issues,
- Byelaw Warden - for Litter and Dogs,
- Tourism, tourist information, events and attractions,
- Maintenance of Public Open Spaces, Recreation and Play Areas,
- Public Clocks, Seats and Shelters,
- Street Name Plates and Signage,
- Removal of abandoned vehicles and fly tipping,
- Unsightly or derelict buildings,
- War Memorials,

The following services are offered up for discussion and comment.

a) **Recycling collections / Civic amenity site** - this function has the backing of the Department, the Local Authorities and many ratepayers and could be run alongside the existing wheelie bin collections. The Authorities would like time for the new Garff Refuse Contractor to settle down before introducing kerbside recycling and this may take perhaps 12 months. However, it is quite possible for initial feasibility studies to be commenced straightaway to investigate which items might be recycled (paper, glass, aluminium, clothes, plastics, other metals, wood) and what the costs would be to the ratepayer.

At present Laxey and Maughold provide an amenity refuse vehicle on a monthly basis which is used by residents at minimal costs, it is intended to continue with such provision. Laxey and Lonan have also made available to residents use of the Eastern Civic Amenity site at Snugborough to those residents who wish to pay the annual fee of £15. It is hoped that this service can continue. It would be desirable for Garff to

explore the possibility of a cost effective provision of a central for Garff civic amenity site.

**Objective: To introduce cost effective and efficient kerbside recycling collections by April 2006-7.**

b) **Hedge cutting, street cleaning** - these services are presently provided by the Department of Transport. The committee believes that hedge cutting and street cleaning can be managed more effectively under local control. We believe these are important services in a rural environment and that by operating jointly such services can be secured at a competitive price and provide an improved management regime for hedgerow diversity maintenance.

**Objective: To enter into discussions with Government to see if they will devolve these services. If so, these services could then be negotiated by the Garff Joint Initiative and then put out to tender.**

c) **Litter collections, public toilet cleaning and street lighting** - these services are all provided separately by the three Authorities. It may be possible to negotiate together to provide more cost effective provision to the ratepayer.

**Objective: To begin discussions between the three local Authorities and negotiate joint contracts as they come up for renewal.**

d) **Warden provision** - if the Local Authorities are to provide a designated **Community Warden** in future, it is probable that this provision will be most economically and efficiently met by employing a **Garff warden**. This would be a new post and an appointment could be made after negotiations between the three Local Authorities.

**Objective: To begin investigating the extent of such a role within Garff and its likely costs.**

e) **Strategic planning** (and similar bodies) - where Government seeks the views of Commissioners on whole island matters such as the strategic housing review and where such decisions are likely to affect Garff as a whole then the views of a **Garff** response will carry **more weight** than the individual views of the three Local Authorities. A committee would therefore be set up, probably with one member from each Authority to draw up a collective response. But see initial planning applications (l).

**Objective: To set up a strategic planning sub committee. This response could also be extended to other issues which require a considered long term and whole island response. e.g. Transport bill.**

f) **Beach cleaning** – this function is carried out by volunteers at present and will remain so until the IRIS scheme is in place across the Island.

**Objective: To extend beach cleaning once the IRIS scheme is operating.**

g) **Library and Tourist Information provision** - If Library provision is to be devolved then for a rural Sheading like Garff the option of providing either a mobile library (currently provided by central government) or an Information Technology centre may be considered. This could be coupled as a mobile tourist information centre during the holiday period and travel around Garff.

**Objective: To investigate costs and liaise with government as to how such a service might be run effectively.**

h) **Minor Road repairs**- Presently this is a DOT function administered from Douglas with teams of workmen being deployed island wide as required. Accepting to take on this service would necessitate the employment of a local team of workmen and is most likely to be cost effective only as a **Garff service**. Although it would lead to an increase in the rates the benefits could be an improvement in the **quality of rural roads** and a **quicker response to problems** e.g. blocked drains when they arise. This could be a large benefit to the ratepayers in Garff.

**Objective: To question the government as to whether they would devolve the minor road repair service, with their subsequent saving in costs being passed onto the Garff Joint Initiative.**

#### **4) Services which will remain with the individual Local Authorities for the present:**

a) **Administration** - whilst the majority of service provision remains with the individual Local Authorities (Laxey, Lonan and Maughold) they will continue to administer their own parishes, employing their own clerks and raising their own rate in the immediate future. Changes to a joint administration may occur if Garff were to provide more services jointly.

b) **Civic hospitality** - the provision of Parish days and Fairs, the invitation of guests to each Local Authority and other such community events will remain with the local Commissioners. In future, events may be held specifically to promote Garff, in which case the costs would be shared.

**Reason: Civic hospitality reinforces local identity and maintains tight knit communities.**

c) **Community Halls** - presently all three Local Authorities hire out community halls (church halls and school halls) for functions as and when they are needed and no further change is envisaged.

d) **Recreation and open spaces** - presently each Local Authority employs its own full or part-time local staff. The bulk of the work occurs during the spring and summer periods and it is inevitable that the grounds staff will all be required at the same time. Local labour use means that the standard of work is high, the value for money excellent and travelling kept to a minimum. Local knowledge is also maintained. In future the purchasing of any expensive machinery (other items) might be more cost effective as a Garff purchase.

**Reason: Management of open spaces and play areas are tended during the spring-summer season. Local labour use maximises efficiency and expertise.**

e) **Initial Planning Applications** - in a rural area the size of Garff it is essential that planning applications are viewed with as much local knowledge as possible. This is best achieved by individual Local Authorities commenting upon local planning applications within the framework set down by Government. (But see (e) strategic planning).

**Reason: Local knowledge is essential and this is largely confined to the local authority commissioners.**

f) **Housing Boards** - Presently Maughold has a representative on the Ramsey and Northern Sheltered Housing Committee whilst Laxey and Lonan have representatives on Laxey's Cooil Roi Sheltered Housing Authority.

**Reasons: There are some instances such as sheltered housing where individual local authorities may co-operate with other Local Authorities. If this is the most efficient means of providing a service it should remain.**

**5) Services which should remain with or be taken on by central government with reasons.**

a) **Local Authority Housing** - With a Government housing stock of some 5600 units Local Authority Housing will be most cost effectively run from central government, in theory. Economies of scale mean it will be less cost effective and less efficient split up into either five separate areas (4+1) or devolved to individual Local Authorities. Anomalies such as waiting lists should be researched and dealt with equitably by DOLGE.

b) **Building Control (and technical assistance)**- If Local Authorities wish to have their own officers e.g. Douglas then that is their decision and as the Report (Nov04) makes clear it should be a profitable service. However where areas are either too small or simply wish to use the Departments officers then they should be charged out to Local Authorities on a daily or hourly rate. The use and charge would be borne by the individual Local Authorities in Garff at present.

c) **Swimming Pools** - presently Maughold Rate payers contribute a flat 2.5p rate towards the Ramsey Pool and have one member who sits on the management board, which is also made up of Commissioners from the other northern parishes and Ramsey. Laxey and Lonan do not pay towards any designated pool, the nearest, the NSC being Government funded.

To ensure equality of standards, services, charges and management expertise it would seem sensible to bring all swimming pools under the Department of Tourism and Leisure as they are, at least in part, used as a tourist facility and also used by the Department of Education. Any loss of revenue to central government could be recouped through charging procedures, although it may be that the provision as a whole becomes more cost efficient .i.e. total costs decrease.

## **6) Structure of a Garff Committee - The present situation**

Currently, Maughold and Lonan ratepayers elect five commissioners and Laxey Village seven. There is some reluctance for members of the parishes to stand and Maughold did not hold an election last time (2004) though more than five persons requested application forms, so there is clearly interest. In the case of Laxey Village the seven seats were only filled after a second advertisement. This may indicate that a five seat board is sufficient unless a valid case is made for retaining seven seats on the board. The elected boards serve for a period of four years and set an annual rate each year based on the services to be provided and their estimated cost. Each board appoints and pays for its own clerk who submits accounts annually, in some cases a full time clerk is employed and in other cases a part time clerk is paid for on an agreed basis.

## 7) Structure of a Garff Committee - A possible way forward

From those members elected as Commissioners to Laxey, Lonan and Maughold there are several options as to how a committee might be established and run.

a) Each Local Authority elects **one member** to the Committee, giving three designated officials. From these three, a **chairman and two vice-chairmen** are elected, any of whom can chair a meeting of the Committee. The elected chairman could serve for a period of 1, 2, 3 or 4 years. Alternatively the position of chairman could be rotated between the three authority chairmen on a monthly or six monthly basis.

b) From the remaining Commissioners elected to their respective Local Authorities any of them could choose to attend a Garff meeting, but the principle would be for at least **two members from each local authority** to be present at any meeting. (In many instances the elected Garff member plus one other). By keeping flexibility it means that all Commissioners can have an input and that absences can be covered. Each meeting must be chaired by one of the three designated officials, again offering flexibility.

c) Decisions would be made on a consensual basis .i.e. the agreement between all three Local Authorities must be reached, in practice this will mean that the designated officials must agree firstly and where important decisions are to be made such as spending ratepayer's money then the three Local Authority Boards must also agree.

d) The meetings of the elected Garff Committee would commence early in 2005 and deal with the unified Waste collection service first of all. Meetings could be held at Laxey Commissioner's Offices on a monthly basis (or some other agreed timetable according to need), in addition to the local Authorities monthly meetings.

e) The cost of providing the waste collection to Laxey, Lonan and Maughold from 2005-8 has already been agreed. This cost per household could be shown as a separate item on the rates bill as '**Refuse Collection / Disposal**' (**Garff service**). By so doing the ratepayer will be introduced to the idea that their rates are now partly a Local Authority rate and partly a Garff rate.

f) The individual Local Authorities would continue to carry out all other functions and set their own rates. These will continue to be shown on the rates bill as **Commissioners rate**. The Garff Authorities have had further discussions regarding the local authority responsibilities and agree in principle that the services to the ratepayers of Garff would be further improved if a Joint Committee were formed. Any increase in rates would be set by the existing local authorities, which would continue to operate as at present with local accountability.

g) As other services are negotiated between Laxey, Lonan and Maughold Commissioners to be delivered jointly (hedge cutting, warden, street lighting and cleaning services etc.) the **Garff rate can be expected to increase**. Where they reflect new services, such as hedge cutting and warden provision there will be no

decrease in Commissioners rate, but where the service had previously been a Local Authority function then the Commissioners rate would decrease as services passed across to the Garff Rate.

**h) The structure of a Garff Committee must provide flexibility, adaptability and accountability.**

1. It must be able to manage, from the outset, new services as they are added, in as seamless a manner as possible. This will help ensure **effective and efficient management** of services provided by Garff.
2. It must seek to represent the views of all elected commissioners i.e. allow all commissioners an opportunity to have their views heard. This will ensure **maximum scrutiny** and so ensure **accountability**.
3. It must work on the basis of **consensus** i.e. all three local authorities must agree on all proposals. This will ensure that every rate payer's interest is represented when decisions are taken.

## **8) Conclusion**

In conclusion the Local Authorities of Garff; Laxey Village, Lonan Parish and Maughold Parish believe that a degree of local government reform would be of benefit to their ratepayers. The ratepayers of Garff who have been consulted at public meetings on the matter are in unanimous support of the development of the 'Garff Joint Initiative'. This initiative has already resulted in collective savings in the area of Waste Collection, and discussions have now advanced to include issues such as kerbside collection, hedge cutting and access to a civic amenity site. The Garff Authorities believe that the Garff ratepayer will see an improvement in services and minimal increase in rates with the formation of a joint Garff Committee with allocated responsibilities. The rural nature of these authorities would not be compromised neither would local accountability. Whilst the Garff proposals require considerable work to bring to fruition, they have the commitment of the three Boards of Commissioners.