THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

DOMINICA

1 INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Dominica is part of the Windward Islands in the eastern Caribbean with a population of 72,386 and covers an area of 754 sq km.[1]

Dominica is a unitary state with a president as constitutional head. It has a unicameral parliament, the House of Assembly, with 30 members and one *ex officio* member. Twenty-one members (representatives) are directly elected, each representing one of 21 constituencies, and serve for a five-year term. Nine senators are appointed by the president – five on the advice of the prime minister and four on the advice of the leader of the opposition.

The House of Assembly elects the president for a five-year term. The maximum a person can serve as president is two terms. The president appoints the prime minister and, on the advice of the prime minister, appoints other ministers to the cabinet.

Dominica has a complex network of local government. It has seven districts, a network of town and village councils, and a Carib Council which governs the Carib territory, an area in the island's east set aside for the indigenous Carib people. The capital, Roseau, has its own town council.

Local government contributes around 0.2% to GDP.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF DOMINICA

2.1 Position of local government in the state

Roseau City Council and the Carib Council have a certain amount of local autonomy but other councils do not have a great deal of independence from the state, running a limited amount of local services. In the current debate on the reform of the constitution and other developments, the Dominica Association of Local Authorities is campaigning for a greater role and powers for local government, with some success.

Following independence in 1978, the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP) was in power for many years. Since then the Labour and Workers' parties have gained ground. Dominica was the first Caribbean state to have a woman prime minister, Dame Mary Eugenia Charles, who served for 15 years (three consecutive terms).

The most recent national elections were held in May 2005. The Dominica Labour Party won 12 seats, the United Workers' Party (UWP) 8 seats and one independent was elected. The next elections are due by August 2010.

The Minister of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Information is the cabinet member responsible for local government. The minister deals with local government matters in parliament and appoints three non-elected members to serve on village councils, and five on the city and town councils, from the nominations put forward by the elected councillors in each authority.

The local government commissioner is the senior official in the ministry responsible for local government affairs. The permanent secretary also advises the minister on local government matters.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

Local government is not enshrined within the constitution of Dominica.

3.2 Main legislative texts

The main legislation relating to local government is:

- Town Council Act 1937
- Village Council Act 1954
- Carib Council Act 1978
- City Council Act 1984
- Urban Council Act 1992.

The Carib Council Act 1978 formalised internal

self-government for the Carib territory by the Carib Council, which was created in 1952.

The Ministry of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Information is responsible for overseeing any local government legislation.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

Local government is uniform across the country. There are seven districts containing a network of town, village and urban councils and the Carib Council.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

The largest town council is Roseau, the capital, with a population of 16,038.[3] [2]The second city, which also has a town council, is Portsmouth with 3,625.

The one urban council – Canefield – covers an area with a population of 2,186. The Carib territory has a population of around 2,500. Village councils are the smallest. The largest village is Marigot with a population of 2,663. The average population covered by a village council is 1,307.[3]

One-fifth of the population lives in urban areas.[4]

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

5.1 Council structures

Elections to city, town, urban and village councils are held every three years. Carib Councils are elected every five years.

Each urban and village council has five elected members and three non-elected members. The minister appoints three non-elected members from nominations put forward by the elected members. Leaders of urban and village councils are called chairpersons. The serving members of the council elect mayors and chairpersons indirectly.

Leaders of the two towns, Roseau and Portsmouth, are called mayors. These councils comprise 8 elected members and five members appointed by the minister. In the case of the Carib Council, the people elect a chief who becomes the chairperson of the Carib Council, serving a five-year term.

Women make up 50% of councillors in town councils, 40% in village councils, 30% in urban councils and 12.5% in the Carib Council.[5]

Village councils, which cover a relatively small population and have limited powers, make all decisions through the whole council and have no sub-committee system.

5.2 Local government staffing

The Public Service Commission recruits local government staff centrally. It also has powers to discipline and dismiss staff. Occasionally central government staff are seconded to local authorities – usually specialist staff.

Each authority must have a village clerk, in the case of Roseau a city clerk. This person is the head of paid service. Most councils are quite small and usually have only two members of staff. Roseau has a finance director and four wardens who are responsible for the four wards in the city in addition to the city clerk.

5.3 Independent scrutiny

Councils are audited by the district development officer and the national audit department. Citizens also have redress to the Minister for Community Development, Gender Affairs and Information or the local government commissioner.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

All local authorities are charged with the good governance of their communities. The main service for which local government is responsible, and which constitutes the major part of local government spending, is road maintenance. However, councils also have some responsibilities for parks and open spaces, sports and leisure, and cemeteries and crematoria.

The main role for local authorities at present is an enabling one, acting as a champion of local causes for their areas. However, there is pressure to expand their functions to give them a greater role in service delivery.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

Local government revenue comes from:

1. Property tax	40%
2. Government grants	60%.

Total revenue for local government in 2003/2004 was EC$2m (US$739,000).[6]

7.2 Revenue-sharing

The government's contribution to local government spending comes in the form of a revenue-matching grant and a standard grant, including grants for specific activities such as road maintenance, office running costs and the remuneration of councillors.

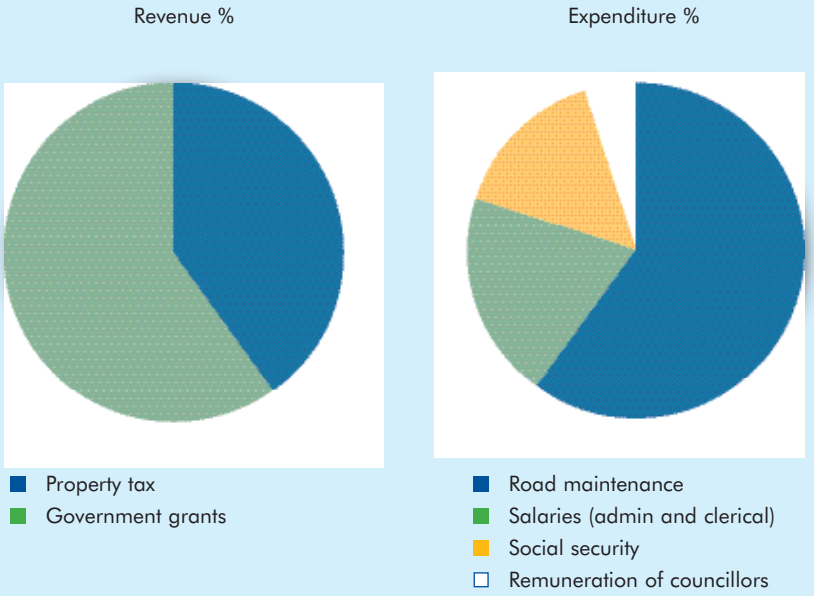
7.3 Expenditure

Total expenditure by local government in 2003/2004 was EC$7m (US$618,322).

Table 1. Distribution of local authorities and population in Dominica

Council	Number of authorities				Population
	City	Town	Urban	Village	
Roseau	1				16,038
Portsmouth		1			3,625
Canefield			1		2,186
Villages				37	49,667
Carib				1	c.2,500
Total	**1**	**1**	**1**	**38**	**74,016**

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in Dominica



The principal items of expenditure where:

1. Road maintenance	60%
2. Administration and clerical salaries	20%
3. Remuneration of councillors	15%
4. Social security	5%.

In certain circumstances town and urban councils may set deficit budgets.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Dominica Association of Local Authorities (DALA) represents local government in Dominica. All authorities and district associations are members, though membership is voluntary.

Some of the seven districts have their own organisations, called district council associations, to bring together local authorities in their area. The National Local Authorities' Clerks' Association was inaugurated in 2003. This body represents the interests of clerks.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The local government commissioner is invited to attend meetings of DALA.

Individual authorities, district associations and DALA all make delegations to the ministry to discuss and lobby on particular issues. The local government commissioner is responsible for the promotion of intergovernmental relations.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

The Government of Dominica's website is used primarily for promoting tourism on the island. However, the Dominica Telecommunications Act makes provision for internet connectivity across the island. Email services are provided in the newly established community resource internet centres.

In 2005 an estimated 20,500 people had internet access in Dominica, representing 30% of the population.[8]

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

Reform of local government is continuing. There is currently pressure for greater devolution to local government in both villages and urban areas. Local government itself wants to have a bigger role in services such as economic planning and trade, education, health, law and order, and infrastructure. Local government commissioner reform is geared at institutional strengthening, improving financial systems and updating legislation.

12 SUMMARY

Dominica has a comprehensive local government structure but local authorities have very limited powers, with road maintenance and championing local causes being their main functions. Discussions are underway to extend their role.

References

1 CIA World Factbook 2007
2 Population Census 1991, Dominica 1991
3 Interview with Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, 7 December 2001
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 EC$2.716 = US$1. The rate is set as Dominica is a member of the OECS
7 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Annex A: Summary of service provision in different spheres of government

Service	Delivering authority		Remarks
	Central government	Local government	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION			
Police	●		
Fire protection	●		
Civil protection	●		
Criminal justice	●		
Civil justice	●		
Civil status register	●		
Statistical office	●		
Electoral register	●	●	
EDUCATION			
Pre-school			
Primary	●	●	
Secondary	●		
Vocational and technical	●	●	
Higher education	●		
Adult education		●	
Other	●	●	
SOCIAL WELFARE			
Kindergarten and nursery	●		
Family welfare services	●	●	
Welfare homes	●	●	
Social security	●		
PUBLIC HEALTH			
Primary care	●	●	
Hospitals	●		
Health protection	●		
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING			
Housing	●	●	
Town planning	●	●	
Regional planning	●	●	
TRANSPORT			
Roads	●	●	
Transport	●	●	
Urban roads	●	●	
Urban rail			
Ports	●		
Airports	●		
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION			
Water and sanitation		●	
Refuse collection and disposal	●	●	
Cemeteries and crematoria	●	●	
slaughterhouses	●	●	
Environmental protection	●		
Consumer protection	●		
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS			
Theatre and concerts		●	
Museums and libraries	●		
Parks and open spaces	●	●	
Sports and leisure	●	●	
Religious facilities			
UTILITIES			
Gas services	●		
District heating			
Electricity	●		
Water supply			
ECONOMIC			
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●		● = discretionary service by the local authority
Economic promotion	●		
Trade and industry	●		
Tourism	●		