

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING – 15 JANUARY 2007**

**SOCIAL PARTNER INVOLVEMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM:** 9

**SUMMARY:** Alerting members to the Minister's thinking on inviting two members of Concordia to join the Strategic Leadership Board to represent the views of the Social Partners.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** For information.

**Introduction**

1. The purpose of this paper is to advise the members of the Strategic Leadership Board of the Minister's consideration of and decision on the issue of whether and how the social partners might be directly represented on the Strategic Leadership Board, in addition to being engaged in the work of the Local Government Taskforce through a separate Social Partners Forum.

**Background**

2. Members will recall that the Improvement and Development Agency review of the Local Government Taskforce recommended that:

"The Review of Public Administration and the local government modernisation programme provide an opportunity for a partnership approach and a fresh start. Not only for local government, but also for central government and the Social Partners. All stakeholders will need to grasp the opportunity for partnership working and cultural change.

The revised Taskforce structure provides a mechanism for involving Social Partners by setting up a tri-partite forum for dialogue and discussion at the highest level. We would suggest that this takes the form of regular 6 weekly meeting with the Minister and the Chair of NILGA to consider issues and provide a focus for joint working."

3. The report also canvassed views on whether three non-executive lay members should be appointed to the Strategic Leadership Board to act as critical friends, but did not specify the form this might take.
4. Members will recall that these recommendations led to considerable discussion at the last two Political Panel meetings. Concerns were expressed by some that to involve representatives of the social partners directly on the Strategic Leadership Board, in addition to a Social Partners Forum, would effectively give the social partners two opportunities to influence the work of the Taskforce. Views were also expressed by some that the appointment of a number of independent experts, with experience of change management in a local government context, would add greater value to the work of the Taskforce. The Minister undertook to revisit the issue at the first meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board.

### **Consideration and Conclusions**

5. The Minister asked officials to meet the social partners who had been represented on the Taskforce Working Group to explore the feasibility of the wider group being represented on the Strategic Leadership Board by two representatives.
6. The social partners were keen to be represented on the Strategic Leadership Board, but did not want to lose the opportunity presented in the IDeA report for the wider meeting of a Social Partners Forum. They suggested that two representatives might be selected from Concordia – a social partnership which brings together local business, agricultural, trade union and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland – to represent the wider group. The social partners have since responded to say that they would wish to have two members of Concordia – Chris Gibson and Jim McCusker - to be considered as representatives of the wider social partners group on the Strategic Leadership Board.
7. The Minister has considered the issues again and is minded to invite Chris Gibson and Jim McCusker to join the Strategic Leadership Board, with a view to having them join the next meeting of the Board. However, before doing so, he wishes to have the views of the Board.