

Minutes of the 2nd meeting of the Local Government Taskforce Capacity Building Sub-group held on Wednesday 31st May, 2006, at 1.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council Offices

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Present:	John Campbell (Chair)	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council
	Cllr Stewart Dickson	Alliance Party
	Cllr Michelle O'Neill	Sinn Fein
	Cllr Deirdre Nelson	DUP
	Cllr Catherine McCambridge	SDLP
	Paul McCallion	External Consultant
	Colette Leeson	RPA Steering Group
	Sharon O'Connor	Down District Council
	Oonagh Aitken	IDeA Peer
	Anne Donaghey	Director Environmental Services, Antrim Borough Council
	Cllr Jim McBrier	NAC representative
	Valerie Richmond	Director of Development, Limavady Borough Council
	Philip Lucas	Belfast City Council
	Denise McStravog	NILGA
	Diana Stewart	LGSC
	Karen Ellison	PPMA
	Brendan Currie	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council
	Robert Gibson	Director of Leisure, Tourism & Arts, Fermanagh District Council
	Dickson Holliday	DOE Legislation Support
	Wendy Hunter	DoE Local Government Reform
	Claire Devlin	DOE Local Government Reform
Apologies:	Gerard McGivern	Director of District Development, Newry & Mourne District Council
	Mervyn Rankin	Ballymena Borough Council
	Cllr Roy Beggs jnr	Ulster Unionist Party
	Adrian Kerr	LGSC
	Heather Moorhead	NILGA
	John Hanna	LGSC
	Norman Dunn	LGTG

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave people the opportunity to introduce themselves. Councillor Stewart Dickson expressed his Party's and his Council's opposition to the seven council model. The Chair noted the issue and advised that in relation to capacity building, the principles established by the group would be appropriate for any number of councils.

2. Matters Arising

The Chair advised that the Terms of Reference had been amended to take account of comments at the previous meeting, and that this would be discussed as an agenda item later in the meeting.

Party representatives were reminded of the meeting on 6th June 2006 with Richard Kemp, the IDeA member peer. The meeting would offer the opportunity to discuss the issue of capacity building for members with Richard Kemp the IDeA Member Peer.

The DOE now has a specific part of their website dedicated to local government reform and the RPA: the address is www.doeni.gov.uk/lgd/localgovreform . Minutes of meetings, Terms of Reference, etc will be included on the website once they have been ratified. The website makes it possible for interested parties to keep up to date on developments within the Taskforce work streams. Initial information on the functions transferring to local government is also available on the web-site, although this scoping exercise is at a preliminary stage it may be a helpful starting point.

At the previous meeting it had been agreed that three smaller working groups would be established to consider capacity building for officers, members and organisations. The draft paper being presented to the Sub-Group at the meeting is the outcome of those working groups.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes were agreed as a true and fair reflection of the meeting on 3rd May – these will now be posted on the DOE web-site.

4. Terms of Reference

The draft Terms of Reference have been amended to strengthen the focus on the customer. The amended Terms of Reference were accepted and agreed by the Sub-Group.

4. Draft paper for Discussion

The Chair outlined that following on from the meeting on 3rd May, three smaller working groups have been working to consider member, officer and organisational capacity building. The working groups for members and officers had met with interested stakeholder groups through NILGA and the Local Government Training Group to discuss the main issues from their perspectives. What came out of the discussions was that the group should look at 'people' rather than at members and officers; and that the report should link them in terms of policy and strategy as well as in terms of delivering services to customers. In terms of building the capacity of the organisation the need for a robust performance management system was highlighted as a means of informing the process of capacity building. This issue links with the work of the performance management Sub Group and the Chair has already highlighted this cross-cutting issue.

The draft report was considered in detail. The main areas of discussion are summarised below:

- It was proposed and agreed that the report would use the definition of capacity building used by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Ref to Report Para 1.1).

- There was general agreement that a dedicated team would be required to take forward the recommendations of the Sub-Group, with financial resources provided by central government in the same way as in GB (Para 3.1). A risk was identified in relation to staff transferring from Central Government Departments to Local Government, in that there was still no certainty about which staff and even which functions were transferring; it was agreed to include a reference to this risk in Para 3.1 of the report.
- It was agreed that in terms of capacity building for potential elected representatives (Para 3.2), the best approach would be to provide an information source outlining what is involved in the role of a councillor.
- It was stressed that capacity building needed to start now.
- A number of issues were discussed in relation to capacity building for officers (Para 3.3).
 - The risk of a loss of capacity in local government during the transition process was identified, and it was agreed that the report should refer to this, possibly in the section highlighting cross-cutting issues, as it also had implications for the Human Resources Workstream. Initial information from a survey within one Councils suggests that a large number of staff do not see their future in Local Government. It was agreed that it would be useful to establish if there had been any research in this area, and if any data was available to the group.

Action: Chair to consider

- Other difficulties which the group wished to highlight included the fact that there at present there are 26 individual organisations, all of which are at a different stage; in addition there was discussion of the differences between central and local government in terms of how they are already preparing staff for the forthcoming changes, and the fact that equality issues must be kept in mind at all times.
- A concern was expressed that there was no trade union representation at the Capacity Building Sub-Group. It was explained that the unions, through NIC ICTU, had been invited to nominate representatives to all of the subgroups, and had chosen to go to some but not all of the subgroups. The National Association of Councillors has nominated representatives to most Sub-Groups, including Capacity Building.
- It is important to have a co-ordinated approach to capacity building and as Professional Bodies, such as Environmental Health and Building Control Groups, are individually considering their capacity building needs, the importance of ensuring timely communication with these Bodies was agreed.
- In terms of development for members and officers, it was proposed that the section on strategic issues should focus on the big picture and include policy development; understanding the context; how funding works, etc. The concept of continuous improvement should be included for officers and members as well as for the organisation.

- It was agreed that the report should incorporate a section focussing on developing the capability of members and officers to work together positively.
- The Chair outlined some of the models available in terms of building the capacity of the organisation, and stressed the opportunity available to take best practice and implement it in Local Government. The IDeA peer reminded the group of an earlier discussion about undertaking a peer review programme in Local Government in Northern Ireland.
- The section on legislation (Para 4) highlighted some of the key issues that had arisen in discussions with stakeholders. It was agreed that Capacity Building would probably require very little legislation as there is nothing at present to stop Councils building their capacity. The question arose as to whether this is enough or if the Group wishes to be more proactive and 'require' councils to build their capacity arose. The general consensus was that legislation should be enough to empower Councils to undertake capacity building and to set out the funding arrangements. Any legislation had to be flexible and empowering rather than prescriptive. The IDeA representative advised that no legislation had been needed to establish either the IDeA in England or the Improvement Agency in Scotland. The issue of funding might be a question for the Taskforce, rather than a legislative issue.
- It was agreed that the legislation representative from the DoE would ascertain if the Power of General Competence would be available to Local Government in Northern Ireland. If not, it would be important to ensure either that the legislative power existed to enable councils to undertake the activities listed in section 4, or that there was no legal barrier to these activities being undertaken.

Action: DOE legislation support

- There was general agreement that capacity building should be driven from the centre; staff should be seconded full-time to a central team and proper funding put in place. In terms of funding, the IDeA representative suggested that although funding might be available during the transition period, it was unlikely it would continue to be available after re-organisation was complete. If the body established to drive forward capacity building proved satisfactory, the Councils should be prepared to support it financially after re-organisation.
- There was discussion about the legal definition of stakeholder, and whether the group wished to include co-opted members as well as elected members in the capacity building issues. The DOE legislation support agreed to consider the legal definitions and advise the group. The Group also discussed the need to ensure that the capacity of other stakeholders for example those who will be involved in community planning was enhanced to allow them to participate fully.
Action: DOE legislation support
- The question of ensuring equal treatment of staff transferring to Local Government from Central Government was raised, and it was agreed to include a reference to this in the list of cross-cutting issues. The need to quickly identify who is coming into local government was highlighted – this was highlighted as a key risk.

- The Chair outlined the key points in Section 5. The Sub-group agreed that Joint Member/Officer Development (Para 5.1.4) would be crucial to the future success of Local Government.
- In discussion it was agreed that the section on Peer Support (Para 5.1.11) needed to be strengthened up. Although Northern Ireland may not be large enough to warrant its own IDeA, one possibility was to forge links with the IDeA, or to create a Northern Ireland branch. The advantages of being affiliated to a national organisation from a national influencing perspective were highlighted.
- All agreed that in terms of Resources (Para 5.5) central funding would be required to meet the needs of all of the work streams. Full-time secondments would be essential, with appropriate funds in place to resource them.
- Rather than look at existing bodies, it was agreed the report should identify the characteristics the group wished to see in the body charged with taking forward capacity building in local government.
- The group agreed that the Recommendations in section 6 should be more general, and there was no need for detailed lists at this point in the report and that the recommendations should cross-reference back to the relevant sections in the report.

5. Next Steps

The Chair proposed that the report would be amended to reflect the discussion. It was agreed that the full sub-group would meet again in Dungannon and South Tyrone District / Council offices on Thursday 15th June at 1pm.