

Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Local Government Taskforce Capacity Building Sub-Group held on Wednesday 3rd May, 2006, at 1.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council Offices.

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Present

John Campbell (**Chair**)
Wendy Hunter (DoE)
Oonagh Aitken (IDeA)
Colette Leeson (RPA Steering Group)
Deirdre Nelson (DUP)
Anne Donaghy (Director Environmental Services, Antrim)
Heather Moorhead (NILGA)
Sharon O'Connor (Down District Council)
Philip Lucas (Head of Community & Leisure, Belfast City Council)
Norman Dunn (LGTG)
Gerard McGivern (Director of District Development, Newry & Mourne)
John Hanna (LGSC)
Diana Stewart (LGSC)
Karen Ellison (PPMA Rep)
Brendan Currie (PPMA)
Robert Gibson (Director of Leisure Tourism and Arts, Fermanagh)
Valerie Richmond (Director of Development, Limavady)
Adrian Kerr (LGSC)
Claire Devlin (DoE) (**Secretary to Meeting**)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Sub-Group of the Capacity Building workstream. The Sub Group comprises representatives of the various stakeholders in the capacity building agenda. Apologies were received from Councillor Catherine McCambridge, Mervyn Rankin and Richard Kemp (IDeA Member Peer).

2. Terms of Reference

After introductions had been completed, the Chair outlined the draft Terms of Reference for the workstream, and explained that he felt the group should concentrate on three main areas: members, officers and the organisation. The terms of reference (Annex A) were discussed, and it was agreed that these should be extended to ensure that the customer service perspective was central.

Action Point: Chair

The Chair then gave a presentation to the group highlighting the key issues, attached at Annex B. He highlighted that the role of the group was, by June 2006, to have identified the key issues pertaining to capacity building along with recommendations to take this forward. In taking this forward it is

incumbent on the group to examine best practice, identify catalysts and constraints, and review potential options. Formal recommendations to the Taskforce on how to address the key issues should where possible include timescales involved, indicative costings / resourcing, roles and responsibilities.

The purpose of the sub-group is one of scoping the issue initially to identify any issues which need to be included in the Restructuring Order and then to highlight the key issues which need to be addressed to build a sector equipped for the challenges of both the short term transition period and the longer term arrangements. The group expressed a keen preference that any legislation would be enabling rather than prescriptive.

The DoE has contracted with the Improvement and Development Agency, an arm of Local Government in GB, to provide Member and Officer 'peers' to work with Sub Groups in a way which best suits the needs of each group for example to provide facilitation, best practice and contacts as appropriate. Oonagh Aitken the IDeA Officer Peer for the Capacity Building Sub Group attended the meeting.

The Chair advised that Richard Kemp, the IDeA Member Peer would be visiting Northern Ireland the following week, and he invited party representatives on the Sub Group to attend this meeting on 10 May at 2.30 pm in Dungannon & South Tyrone Council offices.

Action Point: Party Representatives

3 Issues Discussed

There then followed a discussion of the issues raised, and how best to progress them.

It was stressed by several attendees that a great deal of research on capacity building had already been undertaken, and Oonagh Aitken advised that the IDeA website contained a wide selection of relevant material.

Several attendees highlighted the importance of good communications, stressing that at present, communications were poor, and requested that this should be brought to the attention of the DoE.

Action Point: Chair & DOE Reps

From the perspective of elected members, it was highlighted that there was little formal training for new councillors and that different members had different needs, from executive decision-making skills to the ability to relate to local needs. It was also suggested that it would be useful to build capacity in developing the relationships between members and officers.

Several attendees highlighted the importance of starting to build capacity now, rather than waiting until the structures of the new councils have been agreed upon. There is a need to identify short term and longer term priorities. Whilst there was uncertainty around how the sector would look under the new

arrangements and the new roles and responsibilities it was acknowledged that there are various models of successful organisations, or ideal councils, which could be used as a template, and it was agreed that these models were broad enough to cope with whatever the final arrangements.

As well as developing the capacity of existing officers and members, several attendees stressed the importance of attracting the right quality of new people to the councils.

There was discussion of the issue of self-improvement, and benchmarking against other organisations and the issue of an improvement or development arm to local government was discussed.

The issue of who speaks for local government was raised and there was a consensus that there is a need for local government to build capacity to speak as a sector, to develop the skills and capabilities necessary to negotiate with Central Government.

Several attendees stressed the issue of resources, in terms of time, staff and funding. Chair advised that the recommendations from the Sub Group should include the resource requirements.

4. Sub Group Approach

In deciding the way forward, there was general discussion as to whether it would be better to have some discussion in the full sub-group, but it was agreed that it would best if the three areas carried out some initial work and then reported back to the full group.

It was agreed that the sub-group would divide the task into three main areas, focussing on capacity building for officers, capacity building for members and capacity building for the organisation. The group agreed to divide into three smaller groups each focussing on one of areas above.

Capacity Building for Members

John Hanna and Philip Lucas expressed an interest in working on the interests of Members. As the Local Government Training Group has already started work on developing members, it was agreed that Philip Lucas would join the scheduled meeting on Friday 5th May at 10.30 am in the NILGA offices in Philip House, York Street. The experience of Belfast City Council in this area was highlighted and it was suggested that this might be a starting point to look at good practice. Any members of the Capacity Building Sub-Group are also welcome to attend.

**Action Point: John Hanna and Philip Lucas
All**

Capacity Building for Officers

The group considering capacity building for officers agreed to meet on Tuesday 9th May at 10.30 am in offices of the Local Government Staff Commission in Gordon Street, Belfast. Adrian Kerr, Norman Dunn, Brendan

Currie and Karen Ellison agreed to participate in this area of work. Again all members of the Capacity Building Sub-Group are welcome to attend.

**Action Point: Adrian Kerr, Norman Dunn, Brendan Currie, Karen Ellison
All**

Capacity Building - Organisation

Heather Moorhead, Adrian Kerr, Anne Donaghy and Brendan Currie expressed an interest in working in the area of organisational capacity building. Heather Moorhead, assisted by Oonagh Aitken, agreed to provide an initial paper for circulation.

Action Point : Heather Moorhead , Oonagh Aitken

It was agreed that papers for each of the groups would be circulated to the full membership of the Capacity Building Sub-Group and that any members were welcome to participate in electronic discussions and to attend meetings.

Sub Group members agreed to confirm their contact details both telephone and e mail to Wendy Hunter at wendy.hunter@doeni.gov.uk or on telephone number 028 90 540863. A copy of details currently held is attached.

Action Point: All

5. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next full meeting of the Capacity Building Sub-Group was agreed as 31st May at 1pm, in Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council Offices. It was agreed that initial papers would be provided to the Chair and Secretary Claire Devlin by Monday 29th May to allow for circulation to all members ahead of the meeting.

**Action Point: All
As 29th May is a Bank Holiday papers are requested
for Friday 26 May .**