



LOCAL GOVERNMENT TASKFORCE
COMMUNITY PLANNING SUB GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

These Terms of Reference were agreed at a meeting of the Community Planning sub group held on Thursday 18th May 2006

On 22 November 2005 the Secretary of State announced major changes to local government in Northern Ireland as part of the Review of Public Administration.

In consultation with the sector the Department has agreed to establish a Local Government Taskforce, to develop proposals for modern and effective local government. The Taskforce will engage politicians strategically through a **Political Panel** chaired by the Minister which along with a high level **Working Group** chaired by the DOE Permanent Secretary will provide oversight, cohesion and direction to the RPA process. A number of workstreams will be taken forward through 9 sub groups and many of the issues developed here will feed into the new legislation being developed for local government.

In the consultation document of March 2005, the Review of Public Administration set out proposals relating to the Community Planning process in Northern Ireland. The consultation document proposed a two-tier model of public administration, aiming to clarify responsibility and accountability for the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

The regional tier of the model would consist of the Assembly, Executive and government departments with the presumption in favour of service delivery at the sub-regional or local tier. At the core of the sub-regional arrangements would be strong local government based on areas that would share common boundaries with other public sector service providers.

One of the key functions of councils will be to foster good community relations.

Government's vision of "**A shared future**" (Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland) provides the reference point for developing sharing over separation across Northern Ireland.

At its core is the policy of promoting sharing rather than separation and the creation of a society where different groups live together, and not just side by side.

The proposed Community Planning duty on councils and other public service providers creates a framework to ensure that good relations actions are earthed in the needs of local communities and that the promotion and protection of shared space, shared education, shared communities and shared public services will sit at the very centre of the ethos and culture of public service provision at local level.

Key to the deliberations of the community planning sub group will be a recognition that good relations (and improved community relations) impact on every aspect of life in Northern Ireland – housing, health, schooling, sport, urban and rural renewal, community safety, policing, culture and arts and how our workplaces function.

In Northern Ireland there is currently no legislative requirement for local government to consult with organisations to prepare a Community Plan.

On 22nd November 2005 the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made a statement on the outcome of the Review of Public Administration. That statement included the following;

“...I want Councils to have the central role in delivering joined-up services. That will be achieved through a new system of community planning with a statutory duty on Councils to develop and coordinate the delivery of a plan to address the requirement of their communities.Other public service organisations will be directed in legislation to co-operate fully with Councils in this planning.....Complementary with community planning will go a power of well-being, giving Councils the statutory cover to work innovatively for the good of their communities and fill in the gaps between public sector organisations”.

Outlining in more detail the decisions taken in respect of local government Lord Rooker added, “Like Scotland, I would like to place a statutory duty on public sector bodies to participate in the community planning process and to deliver on agreed outcomes”, thereby pointing towards the Scottish legislation as a potential basis for that to be introduced into Northern Ireland to give effect to the proposed Community Planning power.

The Scottish Local Government Act enacted in 2003 is the most recent legislation introduced into the UK or the Republic of Ireland which includes community planning powers.

The Community Planning Sub-group of the Local Government Taskforce is charged with bringing forward proposals to effect the devolution of the power of “Community Planning” and the power of “well-being” to district councils in Northern Ireland (recognising local diversity and the need to devise approaches suited to local circumstances) by:

- advising the DOE Local Government Taskforce on issues in respect of community planning;
- identifying good practice;
- helping to develop a coherent relationship between the community planning process and other local strategies;
- ensuring effective and broad-based engagement with all key stakeholders:
- developing proposals for the community planning legislation that will operate in Northern Ireland;
- developing proposals for detailed guidance to operationalise the community planning process at district council level.
- developing proposals for effective mechanisms that will champion the community planning process; ensure that ownership of community planning is secured vertically and horizontally within public agencies and with local communities; spread ownership; share good practice and advise on issues which arise as communities take forward their community plans.