

## **Project Initiation Framework**

### **Context**

DoE Local Government Division is currently developing a programme of work in response to the need to both modernise local government and implement decisions flowing from the Review of Public Administration (RPA) that were announced by the Secretary of State on 22 November 2005.

The changes envisaged by the RPA and associated modernising agendas within local government will be taken forward by central and local government in partnership with the wider community.

The Department has established a Local Government Taskforce, to develop proposals for modern and effective local government. The Taskforce will engage politicians strategically through a political panel, which along with a working group will provide oversight, cohesion and direction to the RPA process. A number of work streams will be taken forward through nine sub groups and many of the issues developed including the key area of governance will feed into the new legislation being developed for local government.

### **Purpose**

In his statement of 22 November 2005, the Secretary of State said *that “good governance is not only about checks and balances, it is about focussing on the outcomes for citizens, it is about performing effectively, it is about making informed and transparent decisions, and it is about promoting a strong values culture and demonstrating these values through behaviour. It is fundamentally about engendering trust”*.

The purpose of the governance sub group should be to determine a model for the new local government structures, and define clear standards, roles and responsibilities for both members and officers. Ensure an equal system is in place for shared responsibility in decision making between political parties and develop a system of checks and balances to deliver fair, effective and publicly accountable decisions. An appropriate role should be developed for the citizen to participate in the democratic process through informing, scrutinising and challenging decisions.

### **Data collection methods**

- Desk research and review.
- Meetings with the political party policy officers.
- Meetings with the political parties.
- Academic research, eg structured interviews with academics.
- Structured interviews with representatives from various central government Departments in ODPM, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Interviews with Local Government Audit Office, NICVA.
- Consultative forum meetings with local government officers and political representatives.

## **Scope and Draft Terms of Reference**

The Governance sub group will be required to:

- \* examine each of the specific areas that make up the confines of local governance, (*such as political structure, roles and responsibilities, allocation of posts, key decisions, accountability and safeguards, standards, role of the citizen and civic councils*) and identify those areas where change is required. Decisions taken should reflect the principles set out in the Government's vision of "A Shared Future" – Policy and Strategic Framework for good relations in Northern Ireland.
- \* identify and critically examine best practice working models of local governance elsewhere.
- \* consult with relevant stakeholders where required and develop formal and timely recommendations on the optimum approach to taking forward a range of options / the preferred option of local governance in Northern Ireland which will inform policy and the drafting of the new Local Government legislation.
- \* where appropriate, produce an action plan for consideration by the Taskforce setting out the key actions necessary to deliver each recommendation, the timescale for delivery and taking account of resource implications along with an identification of any catalysts and constraints.

## **Timescale**

Drafting of the Local Government Restructuring Order is due to commence in September 2006. All policy areas to be included in the Order must be scoped and developed by June 2006.

- \* An issues paper will be completed by 5 May 2006.
- \* Consultation group meetings will be held during mid May 2006.
- \* Political party group meetings will take place from mid May to mid June 2006.
- \* Final report will be completed by 30 June 2006.

## **Resources**

- \* Project team includes Victor Brownlees and Nora Winder - Armagh City and District Council, Gerry Millar - Belfast City Council and Janet Cooper – DoE.
- \* Political Consultative Group – (Nominations to be with DoE by 10 April 2006.
- \* Local Government Officer Consultative Group as nominated by SOLACE.
- \* IDeA – 8 to 12 days.
- \* Financial resources as approved by DoE.

**Quality arrangements**

Work will be quality assured by the governance sub group, and the Taskforce independent experts on request and ultimately approved by the Taskforce working group and political panel.

**Reporting Arrangements**

The governance sub group will provide regular updates to the Taskforce on request which will include the key actions being taken to deliver each recommendation, timescale for delivery taking into account resource implications along with the identification of any catalysts and constraints.

**Desired outputs**

The final report will inform the Local Government Restructuring Order and develop the optimum models of the main aspects of governance which will inform local government policy.