

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMUNICATIONS GROUP**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 13 AUGUST 2009 AT 10.00 AM IN CRAIGAVON CIVIC CENTRE**

#### **In Attendance:-**

#### **Joint Chairs:**

John Price	DOE – Local Government Policy Division
Heather Moorhead	NILGA
Gareth Bannon	DOE Press Office
Alan Burke	Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt
Tara Cunningham	Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Moyle
Aisling Doyle	Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon
Alison Goddard	Lisburn City and Castlereagh
Bumper Graham	NIC/ICTU
Elizabeth Harkin	Omagh and Fermanagh
Claire Jackson	Ards and North Down
Elish Martin	Newtownabbey and Antrim
Stephen Hipkins	Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne
Sharon O'Connor	Down, Newry and Mourne
Lisa O'Neill	Local Government Staff Commission

#### **Joint Secretariat:-**

Louise Thompson	DOE – Local Government Policy Division
Mark Maher	NILGA

#### **Apologies:-**

Jacqueline Burns	DOE – Local Government Policy Division
Eileen Cowan	DCAL
Roberta Dalton	OFMDFM
Eamon Deeney	Belfast City Council
Liam Flanagan	Limavady Borough Council
Michaela Glass	DRD
Drew Haire	OFMDFM
James Hutchinson	DOE Planning Service
Claire Lundy	Derry City and Strabane
Jim Murray	NIHE
Grace Nesbitt	DFP
Carol Reid	DSD
Philip Rodgers	DETI

#### **1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

John Price (JP), on behalf of the Joint Secretariat, welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications

Group and thanked them for taking the time to attend. As many of the communication people in the cluster councils are sharing the attendance at these events John asked everyone present to introduce themselves.

## **2. MATTERS DISCUSSED**

### **2.1 Presentation – Eileen Beamish**

At the previous meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications Group it was suggested that Eileen Beamish from Social Research Centre be invited to share her learning's from the health transfer. JP introduced Eileen, whose company carried out research on the effectiveness of communication in relation to the RPA in Health and Social Care Trusts.

#### **2.1.1 Eileen gave a presentation to the Group covering topics such as:**

- Context of Research
  - Research carried out on the health experience, one year down the road
  - How communication was perceived by staff
  - Levels of communication
  - Types of communication used
- Issues
  - Staff responses to change were fairly typical – initially shock and anger leading to acceptance.
  - The further away and more removed staff were from decision making generally the more negative they were.
  - Inconsistencies in how messages were being conveyed caused problems.
- Key Learning Points
  - Key principals – Constancy, Transparency – *What does it mean for me?*
  - Fairness – *How will new appointments be made?*

**2.1.2** A Question and Answer session followed with several discussions taking place regarding the messages and methods of delivering communication. It was highlighted that councils seem to be working at different speeds. It

### **3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

- 3.1** JP presented the draft minutes and Terms of Reference for approval. These were agreed with only minor amendments to the attendance. All action points from the previous meeting were complete. It was agreed that these could now be posted on the DOE website.

### **4. GENERAL PROGRESS UPDATE**

#### **4.1 New Minister**

JP advised the group that the DOE has a new Minister, Edwin Poots. He remarked that Minister Poots is committed to visiting the voluntary Transition Committees in each of the new council areas. It was suggested that the councils should make the most of these opportunities from a PR perspective.

#### **4.2 PwC Report – Phase 2 Economic Proposal**

JP described the range of options in the Economic Appraisal and highlighted the ongoing work in respect of this report. He explained that regular progress sessions were taking place. JP further stated that this report was due to be completed week commencing 31 August 2009. He also explained that the procedure would be that the Strategic Leadership Board would need to accept the Report before engagement could start with the Department of Finance and Personnel on funding.

#### **4.3 Review of Structures**

It was relayed that DOE and NILGA have put forward proposals in an organisational review of the local government reform structures which, if accepted, will involve the establishment of new bodies. It was explained that the report is to be presented to the Strategic Leadership Board on 14 August. If accepted the main change will be that Transition Committees

will be given more power and that an officer group will be set up to represent Transition Committees on a regional basis.

#### **4.4 Local Government Reform Programme Planning and Programme Management**

It was discussed that PA Consulting was commissioned by the DOE and NILGA in June 2009 to act as a Strategic Adviser to further develop and deliver Local Government Reform Programme planning and programme management. This would include the specification and implementation of an associated programme management system.

Following an extensive consultation period with DOE, NILGA, SLB members, Policy Development Panels and Transition Committees, PA Consulting have prepared some recommendations on the programme plan, Programme Management Office, programme reporting templates and specification for the local government reform programme management system. These recommendations would be put forward to the SLB for approval. It was agreed that this system could be very useful to the Communications Group.

#### **4.5 Local Government Reform Joint Forum Communications Bulletins**

Bumper Graham updated the Group on the Joint Forum as the Trade Union lead. He commented that he was pleased that it had been quite progressive so far and informed the Group that the Forum has prioritised a number of key issues – vacancy controls, filling posts in the new organisations, staff severance arrangements, negotiation arrangements for Transition Committees and staff transfer arrangements.

#### **4.6 Establishment of 11 Local Joint Forums**

An update was also provided on the establishment of the 11 Local Joint Forums. It was explained that their role will be to implement arrangements at a local level eg training issues and competition for posts. The aim was to have the Local Joint Forums in place by the end of September 2009.

It was noted that historically Employee Side are the Trade Union negotiating bodies and therefore the delivery of messages from the Local

Joint Forum should be an interface between Trade Union lead and the Employer Lead with the communications person.

## **5. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY TEMPLATE SESSION – DISCUSSION**

**5.1** JP reminded the Group that the communications strategy template is designed to be personalised by each cluster as appropriate to their area's requirements and available resources.

Aisling Doyle from the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon cluster provided an outline of their Communications Strategy which included input from the Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Moyle cluster.

**5.2** It was suggested that it would be helpful if the 11 clusters share their communication strategies with the rest of the Group. JP asked that any further feedback or additions to the Template were provided within the next week.

**5.3** Concerns were raised regarding costs and budgets for communications and queries as to where the funding would be coming from as current spending is directly from the council. JP advised that councils have been offered a funding package to support the establishment of Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams, however no additional funding was available at present for communications.

**5.4** It was proposed that the template should be brought to the RTCG for approval.

**5.5** In wider discussion the issue of the need to develop cluster websites was raised. Members agreed that there was merit in further exploring if this could be looked at on a sectoral level to avoid duplicating work. Members agreed that some early work would be helpful and that the matter could then be fully discussed at a subsequent meeting.

### **5.6 Key Messages**

It was agreed that the Communications Group needs to be the source of the core messages. It was also discussed that the communication channels need to be coordinated and that timing is key.

It was discussed that there is a need to agree collective messages on transition and local government reform implementation to ensure individual councils are relaying and communicating consistent messages on the ground.

## 6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 Group members felt that the next meeting should include a messaging workshop to develop simple, easy to understand messages, which can be used consistently across the sector to promote the change process.

6.2 Website convergence and a general update on the reform programme including the Economic Appraisal and the new operational structures were also requested as agenda items.

## 7. NEXT MEETING

7.1 The next meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications Group is due to take place in the second or third week of October.

Action Point	Action by	Completed
To share the Terms of Reference for Down and Newry & Mourne District Council communications with the Communication Group	S O'Connor	Due to be in packs
Linked In site to be set up for the Group	S O'Connor/ DOE	No – further discussion required
Structure chart with roles to be circulated to Group	J Price	In packs