

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2009 AT 10.00 AM IN LOUGH NEAGH DISCOVERY CENTRE

#### Chair:

Heather Moorhead                      NILGA

#### In Attendance:-

Stephen Burns	Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne
Rachel Craig	Derry City and Strabane
Jacqueline Doherty	Derry City and Strabane
Mairead Donnelly	Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady, Moyle
Liam Flanagan	Limavady Borough Council
Elizabeth Harkin	Omagh and Fermanagh
Claire Jackson	Ards and North Down
Sinead Lavery	Lisburn City and Castlereagh
Mary McCullagh	Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt
Denise McElhone	Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady, Moyle
Pauline Nixon-Black	Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon
Sharon O'Connor	Down, Newry and Mourne
Lisa O'Neill	Local Government Staff Commission
Andrew Scott	Ards and North Down
Tracey White	Newtownabbey and Antrim

#### Joint Secretariat:-

Tara Cunningham	NILGA
Louise Thompson	DOE – Local Government Policy Division
Mark Maher	NILGA
Jacqueline Burns	DOE – Local Government Policy Division

#### Apologies:-

Gareth Bannon	DOE Press Office
Eileen Cowan	DCAL
Roberta Dalton	OFMDFM
Eamon Deeny	Belfast City Council
Michaela Glass	DRD
Bumper Graham	NIC/ICTU
Drew Haire	OFMDFM
James Hutchinson	DOE Planning Service
Adrian McCreesh	Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt
Zeta Murphy	DARD
Jim Murray	NIHE

Grace Nesbitt	DFP
John Price	DOE – Local Government Policy Division
Carol Reid	DSD
Philip Rodgers	DETI

## **1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Heather Moorhead (HM), on behalf of the Joint Secretariat, welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications Group. As many of the communication teams in the council clusters are sharing the attendance at these meetings Heather asked everyone present to introduce themselves.

Tara Cunningham (TC) NILGA's new Director of Communications and Engagement was also introduced to the group.

## **2. MATTERS DISCUSSED**

### **2.1 Notes of Previous Meeting**

The draft minutes of the previous meeting on 13 August were agreed with the addition of some minor amendments to the section relating to Information Systems. All action points from the previous meeting were complete. It was agreed that these could now be posted on the DOE website.

### **2.2 Website Convergence Presentation (Belfast City Council – ISB, Provided by Alan Kelly and Tommy Barr)**

Belfast City Council gave a presentation on potential Northern Ireland regional portal options based on their experience. This included information on the processes involved in developing consistent council websites for the new council cluster areas.

The presentation also covered the localising and branding by individual councils within an agreed consistent style to ensure ease of use for citizens whilst delivering efficiencies.

The issue of council website licensing arrangements for online payment functions was raised as an issue that needs to be considered.

This was followed by a Question and Answer session. The main questions focussed on funding for the development of a new site and the maintenance of existing sites until the transfer date.

It was agreed that there are two key elements of this work – what is needed now to support early convergence and what is required to support long term development by linking in with other relevant groups such as Policy Development Panel B.

The need for a sub-group to look at IT matters was discussed. It was decided after the meeting that as there are already a number of groups working on different elements of IT that some work should be done to see what each of these groups cover rather than setting up another group in isolation.

NILGA agreed to look in to the various groups and report back. The approach will be discussed further at the next Communications Group meeting to decide how the Group can best link in with this existing work.

### **3. GENERAL PROGRESS UPDATE**

#### **3.1 New Operational Structures**

HM provided an overview of the implementation structures both current and new. She also detailed how existing functions such as the Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) will be replaced by the Regional Transition Committee (RTC) and the Regional Transition Management Team (RTMT). Details of how these new groups engage with the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB), Policy Development Panels (PDPs), 11 Transition Committees (TCs) and Transition Management Teams (TMTs) were also discussed.

These changes ensure the inclusion of the Transition Committees and therefore reflect that Transition Committees will be the main drivers for moving forward the reform programme when they become statutory early in 2010.

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

A copy of the PA Consulting presentation on Planning & Programme Management that was presented to the SLB in October was provided for the Group. This includes templates to streamline and increase consistency for reporting on the reform programme. PA Consulting produced these recommendations following consultation with stakeholders including SLB members, Policy Development Panels and Transition Committees.

The Group were informed that there is ongoing work to investigate ways to provide Transition Committees and Transition Management Teams with training and support in completing the new templates. As part of their ongoing work PA Consulting will visit all Transition Committees. SOLACE working with Deloitte and SOLACE Enterprises are supporting Chief Executives working with Transition Committees.

### **3.3 Economic Appraisal (PwC Report)**

The Group received a copy of the PwC presentation that was provided to SLB members. The fact that the Minister had announced a 6-week period of stakeholder engagement was also discussed. These are due in by the end of November and are to be discussed at the next SLB meeting.

The report assesses a number of options for how local government will look in the future and the costs associated with each of the proposed options. The report points to option 5 as producing the largest efficiency savings with a projected £438 million being saved over 25 years.

#### Key recommendations:

- 11 new councils
- Attracting more people to become involved in local government as councillors
- Business Service Organisation (BSO) – new organisation governed by joint committee of the 11 new councils, delivering collaborative solutions across local government
- A new single Waste Disposal Authority delivering efficiencies at a regional level while continuing to recognise sub-regional differences
- Creating the retained organisations of central government departments that have transferred functions to local government
- Creating a new Local Government Association to act on behalf of local government
- Creating a new role, capability and capacity for the NIAO as monitor the new performance framework for local government
- Creating a new role for the NI Ombudsman that is responsible for monitoring the new Code of Ethics
- Developing a comprehensive framework for HR issues
- Managing the programme of work for the change programme with the necessary structures and resources
- Developing a comprehensive approach to funding
- Consideration of equality impact assessments
- Creation of a new culture and set of behaviours within local government

#### **3.4 Regional Transition Co-ordinating Group (RTCG) Feedback – Branding**

HM highlighted that RTCG members had approved the local communications strategy template that was produced by the Group at their previous meeting subject to amendments in relation to branding. There had been discussion at this meeting as to whether councils would be able to re-brand after May 2011 or when Transition Committees become statutory, if content with their name.

It was agreed that a working group from the Communications Group should be put together to look at branding planning and options of how councils can work collectively together. Louise Thompson (LS) asked that volunteers for this Group contact her.

### **3.5 Local Government Reform Joint Forum (LGRJF)**

A copy of the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of the Local Government Reform Joint Forum (LGRJF) bulletin was provided to attendees in their packs and had previously been emailed to them. Concerns were raised regarding the consistency of communication around issues such as Vacancy Control.

Liam Flanagan highlighted the need for consistent and timely communication with staff that are 'at risk' that a clear line across the board needs to be communicated. Lisa O'Neill (Local Government Staff Commission) confirmed that a bulletin detailing the people that are not 'at risk' was due to go to the LGRJF next week for approval. If approved it would be distributed to councils.

HM highlighted that a Local Government HR and Leadership conference, organised by SOLACE and LGSC, is planned for early December and invitations will be sent out to councils in due course.

### **3.6 Council Communications**

Concerns were raised about the lack of communication top down in councils. TC confirmed that she is currently looking at addressing this as well as queries at a local level in councils.

It was also discussed that the Minister has already commenced visits to Transition Committees. NILGA are continuing to meet with councils and will begin meetings with TCs at the start of next year.

## **4. MESSAGING WORKSHOP**

Members were split in to groups with each group being given two audiences (internal and external) to consider. By working through a process of thinking out what the challenges are for each audience and what we would like them to think, feel and do, key messages were produced. These were then presented to the wider group for discussion.

The aim behind this exercise was to get agreed, simple messages which can be used consistently across the sector to underpin communication with these audiences. This more tailored approach to communication should help each audience understand how the change process will affect them.

### **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

Group members felt that following the presentation from Belfast City council the next meeting should include an update on the various groups currently looking at website convergence, particularly Policy Development Panel B.

Members also discussed that they would like the next session to look at communication handling plans for the establishment of the Statutory Transition Committees with the different stakeholder groups.

### **6.0 NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Local Government Reform Communications Group is due to take place on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

<b>Action Point</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Research into the various groups working on IT strategies	TC	
Establishment of branding sub-group	LT/ JB	Complete
Collation of key messages paper for RTCG approval	LT	Complete