



Minutes of the fourth meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board Modernisation Subgroup Strand B –Service Improvement held on 12th December 2007 in Lisburn Civic Centre

Present: Cllr Sean Begley (Chair), Cllr Dermot Curran (Vice Chair), Cllr Ross Hussey, Cllr Sean Kerr, Cllr Alan McDowell, Cllr Michelle McIlveen MLA, Cllr Tony Hill, and John Gillanders.

In Attendance: Alan Hanna and Andrea Reid(NILGA); John Price and Damian Dean (Local Government Policy Division, Department of the Environment). John Halligan on behalf of Rose Crozier

Apologies: Cllr Eddie Rea, Cllr Gary Stokes, Danny McSorley, Rose Crozier, and Ald Gordon Dunne

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members and as there were new attendees he asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies

The apologies were noted.

3. Presentation

Dr Andrea Reid of NILGA made a presentation to the group on the development of a customer service strategy. This is being produced in conjunction with the Strand A sub-group but has implications for all modernisation activities. The vision for this strategy is that council services should be 'Citizen Centric'. Such services would be consistent, co-ordinated and proactive to meet the needs of citizens and councils will report to their residents about the services they provide. Such a strategy would have a number of objectives. It would ensure that all citizens have equal access to the services that they need; delivered by an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver better access to improved public services. Overall the plan is to deliver better access to better quality public services in the most cost-effective and efficient way. In developing such a strategy consideration has to be given to people, processes and technology. Some strategies fail because they leap straight to the installation of new technology without considering the implications for people and whether the organisation has the right processes in place.

A new Customer Service Strategy should lead to service levels that exceed citizen expectations and be beneficial to employees and citizens.

Members raised a number of questions about the best means of consulting with communities and how services would be delivered to meet their needs, for example using 'one stop shops' for a range of public services. Members also discussed the importance of developing a joined up public service role across the whole public sector. Cllr Kerr commented that MLAs and Councillors alike must raise themselves above the debate over where services should be delivered in order to put the needs of citizens first. Cllr Hill said that employees also need to be engaged in this strategy. Andrea explained that she would be developing the Customer Service Strategy as part of her work with Strand A. Cllr McIlveen MLA said that it was important to visit councils to ensure that they were fully involved in the production of this strategy. She also pointed out that there was a need for DoE and NILGA to consult widely on this strategy to build support and engagement.

4. Minutes of last meeting

These were accepted as a true record, proposed by Cllr Hussey and seconded by Cllr Kerr.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Remuneration

It was clarified that elected members will receive a payment equivalent to £2,700 annually for their work on the Modernisation sub-groups. This is payable on a monthly basis regardless of whether there is a meeting in a given month or if a member attends. Cllr Hill queried the use of the civil service mileage rate which is lower than the amount paid to members by their councils or NILGA. John Price agreed to raise this within DoE or the SLB as appropriate.

7. NI Direct

A meeting was held with Ray Wright and Colin Cluney of the Delivery and Innovation Division of the Department of Finance and Personnel on 20th November Local Government involvement in NI Direct. The meeting was attended by the Secretariat along with John Halligan of Belfast City Council and Cllrs Kerr and Rea. Moira McVeigh of North Down Borough Council was also invited to attend but was unavailable. Ray Wright explained that NI Direct would be commencing with a phased approach early in 2008. The plan was to expand the existing civil service call centre in order to alleviate some of the pressures on services like Planning which were receiving high call volumes. The Delivery and Innovation Division were also pleased at the prospect of local government being part of NI Direct but were concerned about whether all parts of local government would take part equally. The

DID also indicated that they would be prepared to support feasibility studies to establish which local government services could be included in NI Direct. Cllr McDowell expressed strong disapproval of having a phased approach to NI Direct believing that this would cause confusion in the public's mind and may drive even more people to contact councils unnecessarily. Cllr Hussey said that there were unacceptable delays in not including health, education and housing in the first phase of the NI Direct programme. Cllr Kerr commented that the meeting with the DID had been good but that there is real potential for confusion over the NI Direct programme. John Halligan explained that councils would come on board to support NI Direct but will need to do some work on their back office systems to be compatible. The meeting was firmly of the view that the phased approach to NI Direct was the wrong way to deal with this important issue.

8. Procurement

Damian Dean reported that this work is progressing. This has involved establishing how procurement is carried out in each council. Early results indicate that different councils operate in different ways. In some councils there is a dedicated procurement function while in others procurement is carried out by individual operational departments. Cllr McDowell said it would be valuable to consider some options for procurement processes in the new local authorities including a single procurement authority or clusters of councils coming together on joint procurement. The group working on procurement are hoping to identify a specific procurement activity in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of joint procurement on a pilot basis. Work is also progressing regarding e-procurement.

9. Shared Services

It was agreed to put the plans for a consultancy exercise on shared services on hold for the present. While the review of the RPA decisions on local government is underway there are a number of proposals coming forward about how services should be organised in the future. These include suggestions for the use of shared services and so it may be premature to commission additional work on shared services at this time.

10. Joint Secretariat Report

The following items were highlighted from the Joint Secretariat Report:

10.1 Common ICT Infrastructure

Network Infrastructure

NIRAN (Northern Ireland Regional Area Networking) are to provide cost estimates for network infrastructure for potential pilot Councils through IT Officers Group. NIRAN are responsible for the NI use of the JANET high speed internet network used in further and higher education across the UK.

DoE officials have had discussions recently with Welsh Assembly officials which revealed that a contract for network services for all of Wales had been let recently and was opened to the wider public service. Follow up discussions to seek further details and potential access to the contract, are to be arranged shortly. It was also noted that some councils in NI had already done their own deals with NIRAN.

Microsoft Unified Communications

Discussions with Microsoft have begun on the potential for the Microsoft Unified Communications application to be used in Local Government. This could revolutionise communications around Councils enabling integrated information sharing, collaborative working, video conferencing, instant messaging and VOIP telephones, as well as e-mail services. It would be particularly useful in the period when new Councils and relationships will have to be established. Microsoft are proposing a deal for local government as potential early adopters and would also assist in defining the underlying network requirements. It is proposed that an event organised to demonstrate the system to Chief Executives, members and those responsible of IT and communications in Local Government.

Local Authority Customer Relationship Management (LA CRM)

The Customer Relationship Management event held with Antrim and Belfast Councils was very useful and very well received. This was the first Modernisation Seminar and was held on 30th November at Antrim Borough Council Headquarters. Antrim members and officials gave an excellent account of their impressive and ongoing customer service journey. They already use the LA CRM system (supplied by Belfast City Council). As a result of the event 5-6 other Councils are now actively pursuing further meetings with Antrim and Belfast and considering the low cost deal negotiated by DoE with Belfast. DoE intend to continue the monitoring and development of this programme on behalf of the Sub-Group and will report on developments. Both Antrim and Belfast Council staff are happy to present information to any Council on request.

Customer Service Event with APSE

The second Modernisation seminar has been organised with APSE on *"Concentrating on Customer Services – Implications for councils, councillors and customers"*. This is scheduled for 13 December 2007 at the Ramada Hotel, Belfast. It is a morning event only with registration at 09.15 with the seminar ending at 13.15 with lunch. Speakers are coming from East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Armagh City and District Council, Kettering Borough Council, the General Consumer Council NI and Nottingham City Council to share their experiences.

10.2 Finance, Payroll and Assets

Consilium provide finance systems widely in Local Government, as well as payroll and asset management systems. Their current application, potential development (including shared services potential) and cost is being explored. Some Councils are about to adopt the new Consilium Total Finance product, including Castlereagh, who

wish to work with DoE to help assessment of the new products on a pilot basis for other Councils.

10.3 ERNACT/EU

At a meeting with Derry and Donegal Councils, ERNACT and representatives from Cantabria in Spain, we explored the possibilities of a joint funding bid relating to multi channel citizen access to Local Government services. ERNACT are compiling the bid and we hope to review progress shortly. We will advise the Sub-Group of progress.

At a related meeting, Fujitsu proposed the development of a North-West (web) Portal and were to come forward with proposals.

10.4 NILGA eGovernment Working Group Update

The draft terms of reference for an IS Strategy for Local Government were issued for consultation at the end of September. With responses from 13 councils plus the IT and Finance Officers group a drafting team has produced a revised terms of reference. This will be considered by the eGovernment Working Group at its meeting on 6th December with a view to issuing an invitation to tender to consultants in the New Year. At this meeting the Group will be visiting the Future@Work facility in Clare House. This is an exhibition area containing demonstrations of how new technology can have an impact on home and office environment.

11.AOB

There were no items of any other business.

12. Date of next meeting 16th January 2008 at 10am in Lisburn Civic Centre

The next meeting after January is on 13th February both at 10am.