

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING - 8 JANUARY 2008

REPORT ON PROGRESS OF SLB MODERNISATION SUB-GROUPS.

AGENDA ITEM: 4

SUMMARY: Providing members with information on the progress to date made by SLB Modernisation Sub-Group Strand A – Legislative Framework and Capacity Building; and Strand B – Service Improvement.

ACTION REQUIRED: For approval and consideration of key issues

Background

At the Strategic Leadership Board meeting on 15th August 2007 two sub-groups of the SLB were set up. These are chaired and vice-chaired by members of the SLB with members nominated by the political parties and NILGA. In parallel with the review of the Local Government aspects of the RPA, these sub-groups are driving forward the work on modernising Local Government. Both groups have held a series of meetings and have prepared forward workplans. The Modernisation sub-groups are an interim measure while the review of the RPA decisions on local government is carried out. Each sub-group consists of two members from each of the five main political parties with additional support of a Chief Executive and two other senior officers from Local Councils. The secretariat is provided by NILGA and DOE (Local Government Policy Division). The sub-groups present this report as an update on their progress to date and to seek the approval of the SLB to continue.

Strand A – Legislative Framework and Capacity Building

This group is chaired by Cllr Mervyn Storey MLA and the Vice Chair is Ald Arnold Hatch. Officer support is led by Geraldine McGahey the Chief Executive of Larne Borough Council. The full membership of the group is in the Annex to this paper.

The Strand A group aims to strengthen the way Local Government works by:

- modernising the policy and legislative framework within which they operate;
- and
- addressing the capacity of members to deliver accountable citizen-centred services.

The major priorities identified by the Strand A group are:

Assessment of Current Capacity

During an away day the group decided it was necessary to carry out a base line assessment exercise to audit the current capacity within Local Councils. This

assessment should cover all areas within the modernisation programme such as HR, Finance, IT Systems, Customer Service Approach and so on. DoE have currently commissioned Deloitte's to develop a Strategic Outline Business case for Modernisation, and it has been agreed that the work required for the groups base line assessment could be conducted through the Deloitte exercise. A steering group will be established for this project which will include local government representation. It will be vital to communicate the importance of this exercise to Local Councils in order to gain both officer and Councillors time to meet with consultants. In addition it will be important to collect the correct information during this exercise to make worthwhile.

Development of a Communication Strategy

The Director of Communication and Engagement, Máire Killoran, has now commenced work with NILGA. Members have agreed that a key role for Máire would be to develop a sector wide Communication Strategy.

Elected Members Development Programme

It has been agreed by group members that it would be valuable to develop an elected member's charter for Local Councils, to include the immediate need for elected member training. The group have received presentations from John Adams, Employer's Secretary NIJC, on how to develop an elected members charter. The secretariat are currently organising a trip to visit two Council areas in England that have developed very different charters in order to investigate best practice in this area. This charter will include training in subjects such as, Corporate Governance; this has been identified as a key area for members' development. The charter will be in the form of a pick list for Councils to choose relevant development programmes for elected members.

Developing a Customer Service Strategy

This strategy is being developed as an over arching strategy between both subgroup A and B. Dr Andrea Reid, NILGA, is leading the development of this and has presented a draft version of this strategy, based on best practice, to both groups. The strategy is based on four key principles – citizen focused government, accessible services, social inclusion and using information better. It has been agreed that it will be necessary to engage each Local Council to help develop this sector wide strategy. This engagement will require the support from Local Councils and will need to be coordinated with the other priorities from both subgroups. This strategy involves a significant change in the way Councils operate, for example, the focus will be on the citizen and not on the service being offered. This involves a change in organisational culture, processes and technology. This will be the foundation for all other strategies being developed as they will dovetail from the actions required within this strategy. Therefore this will create various issues within Councils and it is important that both officers and Councillors are fully aware of these issues. It will require full support from Chief Executives within Councils in order to be

successful. Issues that commonly occur with this type of strategy involve people, i.e. mainly open lines of communication throughout the organisation, people wanting to retain power in silos and re-evaluation of job roles (some staff may have additional tasks, others may have reduced tasks).

Change Management/Transition Strategy and Human Resource Strategy

It has been agreed that work will commence on these two strategies after the decisions have been announced in early February.

Strand B – Service Improvement

This group is chaired by Cllr Sean Begley and the Vice Chair is Cllr Dermot Curran. Officer support is led by Danny McSorley the Chief Executive of Omagh District Council. The full membership of the group is in the Annex to this paper.

The Strand B group aims to improve the way Local Government works in terms of delivering services in a way which promotes efficiency, service improvement and provides value for money, thus enabling resources to be released to improve front line service delivery.

The key priorities for the Strand B group are strategic and tactical –strategic in the sense of preparing for the future of local government; tactical in demonstrating the value of new ways of working.

Key Priorities

NI Direct

NI Direct is a central government programme to create a single contact point for citizens dealing with public services. Local councils receive thousands of calls a year about services that they do not currently provide. Therefore local government sees enormous benefit in being involved in the NI Direct project from the beginning and have engaged with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DfP) team working on this. The Strand B group is concerned about the plan to phase the introduction of NI Direct by only including some services rather than all services when the programme is launched next year. This is likely to cause confusion amongst members of the public who do not realise that the 'single phone number for government' only covers some services. The implication for council participation also needs to be discussed further to incorporate existing council customer relationship management processes with the new processes for NI Direct. For example what will be the position of customer service advisors in the councils when the NI Direct contact centre begins to handle calls that councils used to receive? A liaison group with NI Direct is being established.

Procurement

Councils in Northern Ireland spend £460m on products and services every year. It is estimated that savings of at least 10-20% could be realised by collaborative procurement. A small group of procurement professionals from the councils are working with the Strand B group to identify ways of promoting collaborative procurement and to carry out a pilot programme with specific procurement activity in order to demonstrate the potential savings. There is mixed practice in councils generally. Some have procurement departments staffed by professionals while others delegate purchasing decisions to operational departments. They are also exploring the potential for e-Procurement development.

IS Strategy and eGovernment projects

The Strand B sub-group works closely with the NILGA eGovernment Working Group on IS Strategy, Mobile Working Pilots and Local Citizen View. Strand B has a substantial overlap of membership at elected member, officer and secretarial level with the NILGA group. The IS Strategy will be a high level vision of a comprehensive strategy for the region enabling councils to work together to develop and provide modern services. The terms of reference for this strategy are being finalised with a view to inviting bids from consultants in the New Year. There are also a number of practical pilot programmes underway to examine the use of mobile technology and the availability of local web based information for citizens. This work is supported by the Delivery and Innovation Division of DfP and Local Government Policy Division.

Other projects

The Strand B sub-group is also working on a number of other issues including:

- Local Authority Customer Relationship Management -Two Modernisation seminars have been held to examine best practice ways of providing high quality services to citizens.
- Shared Services –The group is committed to examining ways of using shared services as a means of ensuring savings for councils.
- Network Infrastructure –The group has also been negotiating with NIRAN (Northern Ireland Regional Area Networking) to make the high speed broadband network JANET available to local government. Two Councils have already joined the Network.
- Finance and Payroll Systems – The group is working with Consilium exploring current applications, potential developments (including shared service potential) and cost.

For consideration by Strategic Leadership Board members

The Strand A and Strand B groups would particularly welcome SLB views on the issues and priorities facing the modernisation sub-groups. To develop the modernisation agenda further both sub-groups would also welcome the reaction of SLB members to the following proposals:

- **Consultation and Engagement**

There are a number of strategic developments that will need the input and support of councils to be successful. These will include the Customer Service and IS Strategy but will also include future work on shared services, HR, Estates Finance, Procurement, Asset management etc. A significant programme of consultation and engagement will be required to ensure that councils feel a sense of involvement in the modernisation process. SLB members are invited to share their views on how this involvement can be built upon. **As a first step it is proposed to hold a half day workshop early in the New Year with Chief Executives to examine ways of engaging the involvement of the Councils.**

- **Communication**

There is a degree of speculation and nervousness about the work of the SLB and sub-groups in the overall context of the review of the local government aspects of the RPA. Both Strand A and Strand B sub-groups believe there is a need to communicate with the whole local government family and the transferring functions teams about the ongoing modernisation work. A communication strategy needs to be developed and put into operation. **The SLB secretariat with the newly appointed director of Communications and Engagement, NILGA, Máire Killoran, proposes to develop this strategy and reporting on the progress of this at the next Strategic Leadership Board meeting.**

- **Future Role of PDPs**

As the review of the local government aspects of the RPA comes to a conclusion the future of the modernisation sub-groups and development of other similar groups need to be considered. **The SLB secretariat proposes to review the future of modernisation sub-groups and the future role for Policy Development Panels for the consideration of the next Strategic Leadership Board meeting.**

Annex –Membership of SLB MODERNISATION SUB-GROUPS

STRAND A Membership

DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	ALL
Cllr M Storey MLA Chair (Ballymoney BC)	Cllr Janice Austin (Belfast CC)	Ald A Hatch Vice Chair (Craigavon BC)	Cllr John O’Kane (Fermanagh DC)	Cllr John Mathews (Larne BC)
Cllr Ian Crozier (Belfast CC)	Cllr Paul Fleming (Derry CC)	Cllr Marion Smith (North Down BC)	Cllr Helen Quigley (Derry CC)	Cllr Lyn Frazer (Newtownabbey BC)

Officer Support

Geraldine McGahey (Chief Executive Larne Borough Council), Sharon Currans (Banbridge District Council) and Eddy Curtis (Newry and Mourne District Council)

Secretariat

John Price, DoE; Andrea Reid, NILGA

STRAND B Membership

DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	ALL
Cllr Michelle McIlveen MLA (Ards BC)	Cllr Sean Begley Chair (Omagh DC)	Cllr Eddie Rea (Down DC)	Cllr Dermot Curran Vice Chair (Down DC)	Cllr Tony Hill (North Down BC)
Ald Gordon Dunne (North Down BC)	Cllr Sean Kerr (Magherafelt DC)	Cllr Ross Hussey (Omagh DC)	Cllr Gary Stokes (Newry and Mourne DC)	Cllr Alan McDowell (Ards BC)

Officer Support

Danny McSorley (Chief Executive Omagh District Council), John Gillanders (Lisburn City Council), and Rose Crozier (Belfast City Council)

Secretariat

John Price, DoE; Alan Hanna, NILGA