



Sub-Group B - End of Term Report on Progress of Work to Date

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1. Introduction

In August 2007 the Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) agreed the Terms of Reference for two Local Government modernisation subgroups to support the SLB in the development and implementation of the local government modernisation programme. The SLB agreed that two Modernisation Sub-Groups would be established with responsibility for (a) Legislative Framework and Capacity Building and (b) Service Delivery. The primary role of each Sub-Group was to provide overall direction and management of the work to be agreed and delivered.

2. Work Programme for Modernisation Sub-Group B

The areas to be considered by the Sub-Group were:

- Front line Customer Service Delivery
- Back Office Service Delivery
- Common Infrastructure

Proposed immediate priorities were:

- Common ICT Infrastructure for Local Government.
- IS Strategy about to be commissioned (NILGA E-Gov Group)
- Review position on underlying network and systems (including Microsoft and Local Authority Customer Relationship Management (CRM)).
- Review position on procurement issues (including e-procurement and sustainable procurement).
- Review position re EU/ERNACT and access to funding for projects.
- Finalise position re participation in NI Direct.

Other priorities

- Review position on joint/collaborative working (shared services).
- Finance (systems).
- Estates (systems, asset management and public service office concept).
- Wider application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- Review of pilot projects (Environmental health, LPS/Building Control, on-line services, mobile working etc).
- Review position on Customer Insight approaches and applications.

3. Meetings Held

Sub-Group B held a series of seven meetings, which included an away day to explore and develop the work programme outlined above.

Work on priorities is detailed below:

4. Common ICT Infrastructure

4.1 Network Infrastructure

We have been developing potential pilots for councils to experience and evaluate a common internet infrastructure. We are working with NIRAN (Northern Ireland Regional Area Networking) on potential pilot installations, through the IT Officers Group, in Banbridge, Ballymena, Limavady and Craigavon. These four have installation costs ranging from £23k to £34k and annual rental costs from £5k to £7k. Because of the importance of the development of network infrastructure, it is proposed to centrally fund 75% of the installation costs, ie £90k approximately, with Councils meeting the other 25% installation costs and the annual rental costs. Pilot projects with three Councils (Banbridge, Ballymena and Craigavon) are now ready to proceed.

NIRAN are responsible for the NI use of the JANET high speed internet network used in further and higher education throughout the UK. North Down and Derry Councils have already contracted with NIRAN on network infrastructure, with resultant cost savings.

A Local Government network will provide better value for money than current provision and increased band width (from 2mb to 10mb), enabling a range of new and expanded services including VOIP telephony, video conferencing and collaborative working, mobile working, better and more accessible service provision around citizens and a sustainable vehicle for long-term development.

Recommendation: Proceed with pilot installation. Evaluate in 3-6 months with a view to subsequent procurement exercise for Local Government network.

4.2 Microsoft Unified Communications & Citizen Service Platform

Discussions with Microsoft are continuing on the potential for the Microsoft Unified Communications application to be used in Local Government, which would facilitate enhanced communications around Councils and enable the deployment of collaborative working, video conferencing, VOIP telephones, instant messaging etc. The development of underlying network infrastructure is key to this.

We are also discussing with Microsoft the potential for their Citizen Service Platform applications in terms of Local Government Services. This is about to be launched and Microsoft are interested in the potential for exemplar/pilot projects with Local Government in NI. Discussions are at a very early stage, but the Platform does seem to have the potential to address citizen service needs, the needs of Local Government and of elected representatives in a unified way. Plans for events to explore the systems and potential are under discussion.

Following the launch of the Citizen Service Platform, an exploratory meeting has been arranged in Belfast in late May with senior Microsoft staff in their Western Europe team.

Microsoft will also be hosting a Sub-Group B visit to the National Productivity Centre and Microsoft's Envisioning Centre in Dublin in mid-June 2008.

Recommendation: Proceed with discussions on both areas with Microsoft, seek finalization of events to demonstrate systems/proposals, work to develop potential exemplar/pilot projects.

4.3 Local Authority Customer Relationship Management (LA CRM)

Further to the first Modernisation seminar held in November 2007 with Antrim, the LA CRM system (through Belfast City Council) has been demonstrated to a number of Councils and has been purchased by Newtownabbey. Omagh and Down have also shown an interest. We will continue to monitor developments.

Use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems can significantly enhance customer service and the effectiveness of customer contact, as demonstrated by Antrim. We would wish to encourage and develop the use of CRM in Local Government.

Discussions have also taken place with other companies with CRM products, including Lagan (which has been awarded the NI Direct Phase 1 CRM contract) and Microsoft.

Recommendation: Continue to monitor and encourage CRM take-up, develop customer service related events and liaise with NI Direct.

5. Citizen Centric Services

5.1 Customer Service Strategy

The draft Customer Service Strategy for Local Government is continuing to be developed and a consultation exercise on the Strategy is still in planning.

Recommendation: Work should continue on the development of the Strategy and a consultation exercise conducted with Councils to seek their input, experience and involvement in the final development of the Strategy.

5.2 NI Direct

Within the Department of Finance and Personnel a new director, Tom Kennedy, has been appointed to take forward NI Direct. An initial meeting with his staff has been held to determine the latest position on the project. A tender for Phase 1 of the programme has been issued concentrating narrowly on emergency telephone system for flooding

for instance, and for contact with a limited range of currently central government functions. Following an initial meeting with Tom Kennedy a formal liaison group will be established to ensure Local Government participation in NI Direct is maximized. This group will consist of the joint secretariat, Cllr Sean Kerr, Cllr Eddie Rea and Rose Crozier. Phase 2 of the project (moving to single contact number) will not start for possibly another 9-12 months.

NI Direct have requested baseline information on potential services and information that should feature in NI Direct (single contact number) and NI Direct Online. This is being collated at present.

Recommendation: Formal liaison group to meet with NI Direct on an ongoing basis on behalf of Local Government and continue to seek to maximize Local Government involvement.

5.3 SOPRA & Northumbria 101

Discussions with SOPRA (formerly Newell & Budge) revealed that they had been responsible for the development of Northumbria 101 giving access to a range of non-emergency services, largely around community safety issues. Further information and discussion to follow to explore potentials for Local Government.

Recommendation: Continue liaison with SOPRA to explore the potential for more timely single number development.

5.4 Public Service Offices

Omagh are to open their new Public Services Centre to the public on 21 June 2008 and it will be officially opened thereafter by the Minister. Further discussion and development of ideas on the potential for Public Service Offices in the new 11 Council model is required. Such offices, offering a wider range of public services to the citizen than purely Local Government, could potentially help offset surplus resource issues in some areas.

Recommendation: Study on the potential development of the concept of Public Service Offices, led by Local Government, in a wider public sector scenario should be carried out.

The Donegal County Council offer of hosting visits to their Public Service Offices in Donegal still stands.

Recommendation: Visits to the Public Service Offices in Donegal should be arranged.

6. Procurement

6.1 Procurement Professionals & Procurement Guidance

Meetings with Local Government procurement professionals have continued and a draft procurement guide is close to production and should help with more collaborative procurement approaches. This draft guide will be consulted on widely with Finance Officers, Chief Executives and members (if required) before implementation. Consideration is still being given to what initial items could usefully be collaboratively procured and grass cutting equipment seems to be a possibility. Procurement is one of the areas mentioned in the Minister's Statement for shared service consideration.

Recommendation: As a priority, work with procurement professionals should continue, to finalise and consult on the draft procurement guide and to initiate pilot collaborative procurement projects.

6.2 E-Procurement

Discussions continue with First Derivatives (successfully in use in Newry and Mourne) and Consilium (finance systems in 21 of 26 councils) about the potential to integrate their applications and offer Councils a very competitive E-procurement solution. Newtownabbey have also adopted the First Derivatives e-procurement solution.

Recommendation: Continue to liaise with First Derivatives and set up a demonstration event with them and Newry and Mourne.

6.3 ERNACT/EU

ERNACT have advised that there is likely to be funding available from previous bids they have made and that projects with the councils in the north-west could possibly be funded. A meeting is to be arranged to get more detail and consider what projects might attract funding. We are looking at how we might access EU monies on a more widespread and collaborative basis in Local Government.

Recommendation: Further priority work required with Councils and with EU funding organizations on more collaborative approaches to accessing funding.

7. Shared Services & Back Office Systems

7.1 Shared Services

Earlier in the year the Sub-Group agreed to defer development of a Shared Service Strategy due to the immediate priority of other work. The Minister's Statement on 31

March 2008 however, put particular emphasis on Shared Services as modernization goes forward:

“Regional shared service arrangements will be developed to deliver common back office services, such as ICT, accounting services, payroll and procurement across all 11 new councils”.

The statement also includes reference to improved services delivery: "It will require the development of innovative and creative models of service delivery that will promote modern and efficient practice in a way and on a scale hitherto unseen, by grouping councils together for the delivery of significant services, such as planning, regeneration, building control and environmental health".

The development of options on Shared Service approaches is now a major priority in terms of taking RPA and modernization forward, and will also need to include consideration of potential group structures and organization. This work will need to be carried out urgently in case there are any legislative implications which would need to be dealt with before the end of 2008.

Recommendation: Develop terms of reference for an urgent consultancy exercise on shared services (and grouping) in Local Government.

7.2 Finance, Payroll and Assets

Consilium provide finance systems (including payroll) to 21 councils, Environmental Health systems to 15 councils and a Dog Licensing hosted solution for four councils. They are also involved with the mobile working pilot with NILGA E-Government Working Group. Following substantial discussions Consilium are considering options for providing services on a hosted basis or through one or more servers, as well as costs for such services, and costs for the modules that councils are currently not deploying eg budget modeling (in only 4 councils), purchase ordering (in 10 councils), stores (7 councils), e-purchasing (2 councils), asset register (5 councils). Subject to discussions on costs, events will be held to demonstrate the use of some priority modules, such as assets register and budget modeling. Councils would still procure products in which they were interested in the normal way.

Recommendation: Liaison with Consilium should continue to finalise their costings and proposals for Local Government.

7.3 Building Control and Land and Property Service (LPS)

We have been liaising with LPS on the potential extension of the Belfast Building Control pilot on Property Validation data to all Councils. This would have the benefit of producing a more up to date Valuation List as a basis for rates bills, but would require the upgrade of current Building Control systems. LPS intend to use E-government funding to cover costs related to the enhancement and upgrade of the systems at no

cost to councils. LPS have been running events for councils seeking commitment to facilitate the upgrade of core systems for the provision of Commencement List data and commitment in principle to the provision of property service data (at no financial burden to councils).

Discussions with the companies supplying the core Building Control systems, Northgate and Tascomi, has been ongoing.

Recommendation: Liaison with LPS and councils should continue to encourage and facilitate the extension of the Belfast Building Control pilot.

8. Events

Two successful Modernisation Seminars have been held dealing with Citizen Service issues. Further events are in planning, eg with Microsoft on the Citizen Service Platform and on Unified Communications, with Consilium and with First Derivatives. Events would also highlight successful projects, eg NIRAN pilots in due course, mobile working pilots, Local View pilots etc and successful service developments in Councils. Such events are a vital part of increasing knowledge and capability in Local Government.

Two further Modernisation Seminars on Stakeholder Engagement, with Newtownabbey and Newry and Mourne Councils and the Social Research Centre are scheduled for the end of May 2008.

Recommendation: Continue with development of a programme of modernization events for Local Government.

9. NILGA e-Government Working Group Update

9.1 IS Strategy

This strategy will outline the framework for councils for their Information Management and the high level principles that will lead on to the development of ICT Strategies providing for joined up and collaborative working where appropriate. Terms of Reference to recruit consultants to produce the IS Strategy are ready to issue.

9.2 Mobile Working Pilot Projects

There are 2 pilot projects underway to explore the benefits of mobile working.

1) Down District Council Building control officers are using digital pen technology to record their inspections. Data is then transferred from the Digital Pen device to the back office system in the council. Inspectors fill in paper forms that can be kept as a

permanent written record, while also transferring the information to the IT system without having to input data separately.

2) The Southern Group of Environmental Health Officers are piloting the use of mobile devices as part of their complaints handling process. The project involves staff from Newry & Mourne and North Down District councils being able to pick up work assignments via mobile devices, carry out visits and fill in assessment forms on line without having to visit the office. This saves time and unnecessary travel, increases the productivity of council inspection staff and removes the need for the same information to be entered on multiple occasions in to the council's IT system.

Both pilot programmes will be subject to an independent evaluation to examine if the projects merit extension to other councils.

9.3 Local Citizen View

Local Citizen View is a way of providing geographical information through the council website. North Down Council already use this service which enables users to find their nearest community facility. Local View has also been used by the Education and Library Board to determine the nearest school for some families to help in the allocation of school places. 3 councils are participating in this project.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Work

It is proposed that the work started by this Sub-Group should be transferred to PDP Panel B (Service Delivery).

In view of the Minister's Statement of 31 March 2008 major priority should be given to taking forward work on Shared Services. As recommended at para 7.1, the Panel should develop terms of reference for an urgent consultancy exercise on shared services (and grouping) in Local Government.

It is recommended that the second major priority area should be on procurement (see para 6.1), where collaborative procurement development could potentially produce savings which could be ploughed back into modernization development. Collaborative procurement also links closely to the work on shared services, in terms of alternative delivery models.