



Minutes of meeting 29th November at 10.30am in the NILGA Offices of the Strategic Leadership Board Modernisation Subgroup Strand A –Legislative Framework and Capacity Building

Present: Ald Arnold Hatch (Vice Chair), Cllr Paul Fleming, Cllr Janice Austin, Cllr Helen Quigley, Cllr Marion Smith, Cllr John O’Kane

In Attendance: Heather Moorhead, Andrea Reid and Máire Killoran (NILGA); John Price, Angela Fitzpatrick and Lorcan O’Kane (Local Government Reform Unit, Department of the Environment).

Apologies: Cllr John Matthews, Cllr Lynn Frazer and Cllr Mervyn Storey (Chair)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Vice Chair, Ald Arnold Hatch, welcomed members and introduced Máire Killoran the new Director of Communications and Engagement, NILGA. The apologies were noted.

2. Minutes from Meeting 24th September

The minutes were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Andrea Reid reminded members that resources for the group are available on Smart Communities and if anyone was having problems with this website to inform Lorcan O’Kane.

It was agreed by group members that an Update on the Legislation should be left as a standing item on the agenda. John Price will report progress; this will include an update on the legislation for the Power of Well-being.

4. Verbal Update on ongoing RPA Process

John Price reported that the SLB had been brought forward at the request of NILGA to this afternoon. The Executive Sub-group meeting is now on the 5th December and the Minister has been having a series of bilateral meetings with her ministerial colleagues. He raised the issue of Council numbers and questioned why it doesn’t appear to be on the table. Cllr O’Kane suggested that the thinking is maybe that if the functions were decided then the form could follow. Heather Moorhead highlighted the significant responses that had been submitted to DoE providing an evidence base and also the Assembly debate that covered all the points NILGA has raised. She reported that NILGA are having meetings with Ministers to lobby them directly.

5. Away Day Report

The report was agreed by members.

(a.) Baseline Exercise Update

John Price updated the group on this exercise. The Baseline Assessment Exercise has been centrally commissioned by DoE in order to develop an outline business case for modernisation. Mr Price proposed that the Strand A group could use this piece of work to avoid duplication. DoE have commissioned Deliotte Consulting to undertake the work. Cllr Quigley requested that the group are provided the terms of reference for this exercise. Mr Price outlined that they are very wide and cover everything within the Councils, but he could supply these to the group for information. He highlighted this work is due to begin at the end of December and the research phase should take around four weeks to complete. Geraldine McGahey raised concern that this was an extremely busy period for Councils and it would be difficult to get resource to help with this research. Ald Hatch also raised concern regarding the timescale of the exercise, highlighting that four weeks is not very long to collect all the information that is needed. Heather Moorhead suggested that officers from the group could meet with Deliotte's to have an input into the exercise. Mr Price agreed and arranged a date for the 4th December at 2 pm in the NILGA Offices to meet with Deliotte's. Andrea Reid will email details of meeting.

(b.) Communication Strategy – First Thoughts and Process Development

Máire Killoran presented an outline of the Communication Strategy being developed by NILGA. She highlighted that NILGA have set two objectives, firstly, Enhanced profile for NILGA and the sector which includes media relationships, party conferences, events programme. Secondly, Engagement with key stakeholders which includes Council visits and Unified voice on the taskforce. The target would be to build capacity of NILGA members to lobby. She raised the following points in relation to enhancing the profile:

- Rationale: Brand building. Media relationships.
- Priority: Annual conference.
- Actions: Press briefings. Events programme. Website. Other communication mechanisms.
- Next year: Awards for excellence.
- Performance indicators: measuring success.

Then in relation to Engagement with Stakeholders she made the following points:

- Rationale: Buy in. 2 way process.
- Priority: Meetings with CEOs of councils, SOLACE & NAC.
- Actions: Engagement mechanisms. Support & training for spokespeople.
- Performance indicators: measuring success.

The guiding principles that will be used are:

- Manage expectations & relationships.
- Consultation with stakeholders essential in order to ensure buy in.
- Sustained campaign of brand building.
- No panacea; rather a strategic plan to ensure effective communication & engagement with target audiences.
- Available, proactive & dynamic.

Ms Killoran reported that NILGA have been trying to get a liaison officer from each Council to be the main point of contact for NILGA. Cllr Quigley commented that there may be

difficulty due to some Councils having different names for job roles, for example, in Derry City Council the communication officer is different from the liaison officer, there are variations in Councils. Ms Killoran noted this information. Mr Price highlighted the aim is to build a strategic view of the sector and the communication strategy is vital to this.

(c.) Elected Members Charter

John Adams presented the paper as a brief example of an Elected Members Charter. He commented that this was an example from mainland GB and that it requires commitment to develop successfully. Mr Adams highlighted that this example charter had originated from the North West employers and has been implemented in England and Wales. He reported figures for training and development for 2001/02 was on average £176 for employees and £153 for Councillors. Mr Adams reported that in England last year Councils spent £249 on employee's training and development and £263 on elected members, reflecting a change due to the implementation of a Charter. He suggested that the group could go on a study visit to talk to those involved in implementing Elected Member's Charters and also to elected members and officers. Mr Adams highlighted that the group need to look at this in a holistic/strategic way. It is not just a set of random courses. He suggested visiting South Tyneside as they are now a four star authority and are getting better. Mr Price agreed with this idea and suggested that this would be a useful exercise for the group. All group members agreed and Andrea Reid will liaise with Mr Adams to organize.

(d.) Customer Service Strategy

Andrea Reid presented the draft Customer Service Strategy. This strategy is being developed for consideration of the group with a view to consult with all councils to provide input into the development. Dr Reid outlined the vision should be:

- Citizen Centric Services
- Council services will be available by various delivery channels
- Service provided is consistent, co-ordinated and proactive
- Services are responsive and accountable to all citizens by regular reporting and consultation
- True Citizen Relationship Management

She highlighted the strategic objectives are:

- To create an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver better access to improved public services.
- To make it more convenient, easier and quicker for citizens to interact with public sector organisations.
- To make sure that all citizens have equal access to the services that they need.
- To provide more responsive, more reliable, more satisfying public services that meet the expectations of citizens for better access to better quality public services.
- To deliver better access to better quality public services in the most cost-effective and efficient way.

Dr Reid concluded by highlighting that Councils should provide service levels that exceed citizen expectations, the strategy involves a step change in service delivery and the correct level of resources need to be put into developed services. This is beneficial to both employees and citizens and the new technologies allow new potential for service delivery.

Mr Price added that the Welsh Assembly are willing to help us develop this strategy and suggested that we could go to talk to them or he could maybe arrange a trip over to visit them. The group agreed that this would be useful. Mr Price to liaise with Dr Reid to arrange. The group agreed with draft strategy's principles and that Dr Reid could develop this strategy further.

6. Future Work Programme

Heather Moorhead reported that the group can't progress on the wider issues until decisions have been made and until we know the future structure of the groups, whether it is five PDP's or whatever.

7. Reporting/Wider Engagement

Heather Moorhead asked the group how we could communicate with wider stakeholders. Geraldine McGahey suggested that the group should wait until there is something more definitive to report. Heather Moorhead suggested that this is left as a standing item on the agenda in order to keep other interested parties informed of progress. All group members agreed.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Date agreed for next meeting is Thursday 31st January at 10.30 in the NILGA offices.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.