



Minutes of the first meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board Modernisation Subgroup Strand B –Service Improvement

Present: Cllr Dermot Curran, Vice Chair; Cllr Sean Kerr; Cllr Eddie Rea; Cllr Alan McDowell; Cllr Gary Stokes; Cllr Ross Hussey

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

Apologies: Cllr Tony Hill, Cllr Michelle McIlveen MLA, Cllr Gordon Dunne and Cllr Sean Begley (Chair)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Vice Chair, Cllr Dermot Curran, welcomed members and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies

The apologies were noted.

3. Process Overview

John Price explained the background to the Modernisation Subgroup. The Review of Public Administration was established in 2002 with final decisions announced in March 2006. To prepare for the establishment of new councils the Local Government taskforce was created and set up a number of subgroups to explore future issues such as capacity building and community planning. With the return of devolution in May 2007 a review of the RPA decisions on local government was instigated in July. During the period of the review the work of modernisation will continue through 2 subgroups of the Strategic Leadership Board. Each of the subgroups will have a Chair and Vice Chair from the SLB and 8 other elected members. The subgroups will also be supported by 3 senior council officers with a joint secretariat provided by NILGA and the DoE. Each subgroup will be responsible for developing proposals for a prioritised, costed and timetabled programme of work to be approved by the SLB. The subgroups are Strand A –Legislative Framework and Capacity Building; and Strand B –Service Improvement. Strand B is intended to improve the way councils work; deliver business-related services which are standardised, simple and value for money; and to enable resources to be released to improve front line service delivery.

The subgroup will report to the SLB in October and will work until the end of the review of the RPA decisions on local government. At this stage the position of the subgroups will be reviewed and the work of the subgroup may be continued under a new structure. Cllr Rea raised the issue of a communications strategy to ensure that councils and other local government stakeholders were informed about the modernisation process. Heather Moorhead reported that this was a very important issue and NILGA were in the process of appointing a Director of Communication and Engagement to lead this work.

4. Update on Officer Appointments

Heather Moorhead explained that each subgroup would have the support of a Chief Executive and 2 other senior officers. The officers volunteering through the Councils with the nominations being forwarded to SoLACE. The officer nominations to the Strand B subgroup will be available in the near future.

5. Meeting Schedule

The following meetings were agreed by the members:

Away Day 27th September –Newcastle

Visit to Donegal County Council -1st October

17th October –Craigavon 2pm

14th November –Craigavon 2pm

Since the meeting the away day date was changed to 4th October in Seagoe Hotel, Portadown and the Donegal visit was postponed.

6. Use of email and web based sharing area

To help the sub-group manage its work it was proposed to set up a dedicated web based area for sub group use. All documents useful to the sub-group would be kept in one place with access given to members of the sub-group and secretariat. Set up of this is considered fairly straightforward but training and support will be available to members.

Members agreed to receive papers in electronic format. Anyone wishing to receive paper copies will be sent them on request.

It was suggested that a useful area of research for the Strand B group would be the existing use of the web by councils –for example what common systems are used; how many rate payers use the web to contact the council and what services are available online. The IT Officers group will be contacted about what records they have on these subjects. The role of the Computer Services Board in ROI who procure services on behalf of the local government sector was discussed. Having a presentation from the group at a future meeting was suggested.

7. Overview of NILGA eGovernment Working Group business and projects.

Alan Hanna explained that the NILGA eGovernment Working Group had been in operation for some time now to share information on developments in the eGovernment field; brief members on new developments; and carry out projects on behalf of the local government sector. Given the importance of new technology in the service improvement area it was

considered necessary for the Strand B group to work closely with the eGovernment Working Group. There is already overlap between the membership of the 2 groups.

8. Wider eGovernment Issues

John Price explained that the eGovernment Working Group and DoE had already been undertaking some work on the key issues for service improvement using new technology. The sub-group agreed to further preparatory work being carried out for detailed consideration at future meetings on the following:

- 8.1 NIRAN –There is no single infrastructure for local government but the Northern Ireland Regional Area Network has offered to extend the JANET network to local government. JANET is a very high speed, high capacity internet connection generally used in further and higher education.
- 8.2 Microsoft Enterprise Agreement –This would involve securing discounts for bulk orders of Microsoft software and licences for local government.
- 8.3 Local Authority Customer Relationship Management –applications developed in one council could be applied at low cost to all councils. An event is being set up for mid-November to showcase the application in Antrim Borough Council. It was suggested to hold a roadshow to bring this demonstration to a wider audience.
- 8.4 Procurement –There should be a review of current procurement arrangements and systems used in local government. Cllr Rea suggested a local government procurement authority; John Price said this was one of a number of options that could emerge. For example Belfast City Council have 6 procurement officers who may be willing to share framework agreements they have developed.
- 8.5 EU/ERNACT –There is potential for a major project in multi channel service delivery (including digital television) funded by the European Union.

9. Away Day Proposal

It was proposed that the Strand B subgroup should have an away day to allow time to consider the wider issues. This will give members and officers an opportunity to build relationships within the group. It was agreed to have an away day on 27th September. As well as members of the group being present it was agreed to invite other partners to make presentations and lead discussions on key areas.