

Comhairle Contae Chorcaí Cork County Council

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OUR REF: PERS/AB

13th December, 2007

F.A.O.: Ms Chris Gavigan and Mr Matt Merrigan

Dear Ms Gavigan and Mr Merrigan,

I wish to refer to your letter dated 31st October, 2007, requesting details of progress achieved by Cork County Council, from June, 2007 to February, 2008, on the measures outlines in action plan submitted in November, 2007.

As requested, my report concentrates on the following areas:

Enhanced Customer Service

Accessibility Award:

Cork County Council was recently awarded the Excellence Through Accessibility Award for the County Hall building, we are the first local authority or private business in the country to have this award to date.

All public facing staff members have been trained and are aware of the Customer Charter. A full audit of signing and lighting has taken place.

The Liebert Building which is presently being renovated will be completed to the same standard.

Payment Options:

The Council introduced BillPay a number of years ago to allow our housing clients make their payments in their local post office. This will be complemented going forward by the introduction of on-line payment options for non-domestic water customers. The issue of refuse bills was centralised during 2007 to allow a more consistent and speedier approach to the issue of refuse bills. The Council is also considering using retail outlets throughout the county for refuse and housing rent payments.

Co-operations with other agencies

Mallow Hub Project:

The Mallow project presents a unique model in Irish Local Government of a successful partnership structure to drive Hub growth at a local level.

Over a three month period from Jan-March 2007 Cork County Council and the County Development Board led a process of planning and negotiation with local stakeholders to strengthen and enlarge the Mallow Development Partnership from a single committee to a Forum to include the full range of stakeholders from local government, local business and the community who impact on the socio economic development of Mallow.

Three Hub Forums have been held in March, June and October 2007 with attendance in excess of 80 people. Using the partnership structure as the implementation vehicle, enhanced service delivery will be achieved through the agreed action plan, shared resources, networking and information.

Examples of achievements to date include the setting up of working groups to undertake a number of key actions:

1. Infrastructure & Transport – Parking audit
2. Heritage & Tourism- Develop an integrated Heritage Plan
3. Recreation & Youth – Recreation Plan
4. Education – Audit of use of facilities
5. Health – Health festival
6. Enterprise & Employment- Marketing Strategy

The project has won an “Excellence in Local Government Award 2007”, sponsored by Chambers Ireland.

Cook County (Chicago):

The Cook County (Chicago) Partnership continues. This includes co-operation from the IDA, UCC, Cork City Council, Cork County Council and Cork Chamber of Commerce.

Other partnerships include:

Local Development Agencies

D.A.U. Section of the DoEHLG on an e-referrals project for planning in West Cork
Tourism inter-agency approach

County Development Board

National Roads Authority where national roads are constructed, including staff seconded from Cork County Council.

HSE using occupational health therapists

Development of shared services

Initiatives include:

The Property Interest Register which was developed by the Council is being utilised by 8 other local authorities. 4 other local authorities are in line to take up the system

in the near future. There is a very active user group in place to guide the development of the system.

A Higher Education Grants Computer System is in place in 6 local authorities.

A new Housing Loans System has been developed in conjunction with Wexford County Council.

A Map Guide GIS User Group and Systems have been developed with 9 local authorities contributing.

The Internal Controls and Efficiency Committee (ICEC) is examining possible shared service options between the 3 divisions within Cork County Council. This Committee comprises representatives from administrative and engineering backgrounds across the organisation.

The Council is currently considering a shared service on Disaster Recovery and High availability with Cork City Council from an ICT perspective.

There is a partnership with the OPW on Mallow and Fermoy Flood Relief Schemes. The Internal Auditor is an active member of Local Authorities Internal Auditors Development Group and attends 6 monthly meetings.

The operation of Carrigrennan Treatment Plant which services Cork City and County is a shared service.

Staff Training / PMDS

Staff Training:

The following staff training has taken place:

Procurement of Training Provider to develop and deliver Disability, Equality & Diversity training programme. 42 programmes delivered and 1,100 staff trained to-date.

Training Needs Analysis conducted in specific areas, training identified, delivered and evaluated.

New Customer Care Training Programme delivered to over 100 staff.

35 staff achieved ECDL. In-house Accredited ECDL Test Centre highly commended by external Auditor and achieved 100% compliance.

IT skills training provided to meet the needs of Outdoor Staff.

160 staff received assistance in undertaking various Cert, Diploma, Degree, H.Dip & Masters Programmes

Occupational First Aid and Refresher First Aid Training provided to over 300 staff
IOSH certified Managing Safely for Construction Managers 4-day programme provided to 200 staff

690 staff undertook training in new Procurement rules.

2,350 staff undertook various programmes, through the Regional Training Centre, in the Non-National Roads area, CSCS & FETAC certified programmes.

Interviewee Skills training developed, delivered & evaluated for 300 staff.

Training provided for members of Interview Boards.

Legislative & policy-led training programmes delivered & evaluated to staff in the areas of Housing, Environment, Litter, Equality, Literacy Awareness, FOI, Stress Management, Retirement Planning.
KPI for Training exceeded National Target.

PMDS

All staff have attended Awareness Sessions. 308 teams exist across the organisation. Because of the restructuring which took place across the organisation in September, 2007, PDP's have been deferred from some staff.

By October, 2007, 1,298 staff had participated in PDP conversations at least once. The Council has co-operated fully with the National Evaluation.

Organisational change and innovation under T2016

A major restructuring took place in Cork County Council in September, 2007. The following new Directorates were created.

Organisational Development

Forward Planning and Strategic Development

Community and Enterprise and Economic Development and Tourism were brought in under the umbrella of Corporate Services.

Major infrastructural projects were brought under the control of the County Engineer.

Housing Capital was brought under Estates.

South Cork which had previously been divided on a geographical basis, is now divided based on services being provided to give a more focussed service to the public.

Billing and dept collection for non-domestic water has been centralised to one unit operating on behalf of Cork County.

The job application and arrangement of interview processes have been devolved to the Customer Contact Centre. This has offered a more specialised approach to this part of the recruitment process, while allowing staff in Personnel to concentrate on other matters.

The Time and Attendance System has been successfully introduced into the Personnel Department. It is currently being rolled out to the Northern Division in Mallow.

VFM/Efficiencies/Effectiveness

Various initiatives have been undertaken including:

Income

Ongoing meetings of a cross functional Review Group tasked to review the internal control environment across the organisation
Preparation of a listing of all the income streams which the organisation is responsible for managing (i.e. in excess of 600 income streams)
Risk assessing each individual income stream from a control perspective
Identification of specific control weaknesses per income stream
Identification of key control weaknesses common across the organisation
Suggested recommendations for addressing control weaknesses – referred to senior managers and line managers for action
Review of Internal Audit Checking function – introduction of revised reporting structures and formalised work programmes. Checkers now report directly to Internal Auditor (as opposed to divisional line management as was previously the case) and work to a structured schedule. Regular network meetings are convened by Internal Auditor with Checkers.
Introduction and Rollout of JD Edwards Sundry Debtors Billing Module for miscellaneous income streams

Non-Income

Brainstorming session to identify possible non-income control weaknesses across the Council (i.e. expenditure and other non-income areas including resource management, fleet management, HR related issues etc)
Risk assessment of issues identified, involving consultation with each of the Council's directorates
Identification of recommendations for addressing non-income control weaknesses - referred to senior managers and line managers for action

Preparation of Corporate Control Policy and Procedures documents

Income streams controls document setting out corporate policy and procedures – draft document prepared – consultation process completed – document to be finalised and circulated. Document highlights “best practice” and “unacceptable practice”.
“Purchase to Pay” controls document setting out corporate policy and procedures – draft document prepared – consultation process completed – document to be finalised and circulated. Document highlights “best practice” and “unacceptable practice”.

Cobh-Great Island Clean Up Campaign

The name of the project was '*Put Litter on the run with Sonia*'

Description of project, This is a novel environmental awareness initiative aimed at fulfilling key objectives in Cork County Council Waste Management Plan & Cobh Town Council's Litter Management Plan.

The initiative ran from 21st to April 28th 2007. It was developed with national stakeholders and local stakeholders on the Great Island – Cobh. The initiative called on all Cobh citizens to assist in local clean up events and encouraged all people to take part in the National Spring Clean 2007.

Coordinated to coincide and support An Taisce's National Spring Clean month, Cobh citizen Sonia O'Sullivan, [silver Olympic medal winner], was invited by Cork County Council to be the high profile celebrity **promoting the anti-litter awareness raising message.**

Outcome : The litter clean ups over the week long event engaged over 470 people with 40 areas of the Island covered. **644 bags** of litter were collected amounting to an estimated weight of 3220 kg. The town and the rest of the Island was visibly cleaner and obviously more attractive to visitors and locals alike.

Conclusion

There has been co-operation with implementation of the modernisation agenda set out in the Towards 2016 Agreement. This is typified by the use of 370 low value purchase cards, by all grades, across the organisation, and the introduction of I.T. Systems as required.

Partnership continues to function very effectively across the organisation. It is operating in all Directorates, incorporating all work groups and grades. It has also been used to discuss the content of the T2016 return, and has facilitated the signing of the Checklist.

There has been a stable industrial climate in Cork County Council. This is typified by the county wide agreed approach by all staff and unions to the necessity and completion of Risk Assessment Forms. This approach is also being used to address the issue of PPP's and their use particularly in water and water treatment plants.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Riordan
County Manager