

Manager's Narrative

The complex environment within which the County Council operates poses many difficulties and challenges, which have to be addressed on a rational and sound economic basis. Among the key areas being addressed by the Council involve achievement of enhanced public services, innovation, efficiency and value for money.

Allied to these are organizational development and resourcing issues which require the co-operation by the major stakeholders before planned significant change can take place and be embedded within the organization.

In this context, it is proposed to set out these main areas within which the County Council has recently been active in progressing both major significant organizational change and the enhancement of service.

In terms of the enhancement of customer service the Council has commissioned a new digital telephone system which will provide direct links with all offices and depots which will be operational early in 2008. Customer Relationship Management software is being piloted in the Environment Department of the Council to improve internal processes, give one holistic view of the customer and deliver a better quality service to the customer.

A review of the opening hours of offices and switchboard has been identified by management as an issue that should be examined by the Partnership Committee. Discussions in this regard are being scheduled with senior union officials which will take the form of a High Level Management /Union Group.

Following an agreement on the restructuring of the Library Service the Council's branch libraries now have extended opening hours.

The recent commencement of web casting of County Council Meetings has enhanced local democracy, in that many citizens of the County can now view the operation of a local government deliberation and decision making process at first hand. The Council also supports the local Comhairle na nOg and availed of the opportunity at the Active Citizenship Conference held in October 2007 to bring the Comhairle delegates into a Questions and Answers session with Councillors from

all parties. This session was the first public expression of the Comhairle's role as the voice of the youth of the County. Accessibility to the Council's Website has been enhanced for people with disabilities and the adoption of the Accessibility Plan will provide a template to monitor further progress in adapting and designing the built environment to cater for people with disabilities. Consultation with the representative groups and stakeholders will continue. The Council's Website has had an independent accessibility audit conducted and the current site is updated on an ongoing basis in an effort to meet N.D.A. information technology guidelines. A new design has been developed which incorporates best accessibility design practices. The Council's proposed new library in Dundrum and new Library and Cultural Centre at Moran Park, Dun Laoghaire will provide excellent facilities for both members of the public and staff. Local offices allied to the library complex in Dundrum will provide a major enhancement to customer service in the West of the County.

In addition to the day-to-day co-operation with other agencies, such as other local authorities and providers of the various public utilities, the work undertaken by the Community and Enterprise Department on behalf of the County Council and on behalf of the County Development Board is built on inter-agency activity. This Department also represents the County Council on Joint Policing Committees, which have been set up prior to the final evaluation of the Pilot Committees. The Social Inclusion staff have also been responsible for progressing (through facilitation) the Multicultural Garda Consultation Committee. The R.A.P.I.D. programme continues to deliver better services to marginalized groups through inter-agency actions. Considerable work has been done to identify multi-agency actions for inclusion in the next Action Plan.

Dun Laoghaire –Rathdown County Council is the first local authority to produce an Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan. Co-ordination committees for both these initiatives have met on a number of occasions and agreed their terms of reference and commenced work on the committed actions.

In relation to training and development the Council continues to ensure that a minimum of 3% of its payroll expenditure is on staff training.

The Council has continued its programme of staff training and to the end of October 2007, 27 course types were organized in-house overall.

There were 83 separate courses provided specifically for outdoor staff, which included Manual Handling, Safepass, Fire Marshall, Playground Inspection, Plant, Gritter, Scaffolding, Pruning Saw, First Aid and Occupational Driving courses. 493 staff attended these courses on 544 training days.

The roll out of the training for the Performance Management Development System for all Departments is expected to be completed by the end of February 2008.

In accordance with T2016 the Council continually strives to improve its organizational performance and, inter alia, it has introduced new ways of working, more mobile technology and the phasing out of outdated work practices. In terms of organizational change and innovation many initiatives are information technology led.

Current examples include the online Planning System, which allows the public to search the planning database and view the status of all current applications and view maps and documents associated with these files. The on-line bin weigh system allows customers to view the current status of their waste collection account. The user can view live data relating to lift dates, lift weights and account balances.

Tuff Books (laptops) have been introduced for use on site by Housing maintenance Inspectors and Water Inspectors.

The remote keying of payroll from Depots has been implemented and the use of GPS has been introduced in the Water and Drainage area. The following projects are at an advanced stage of development VOIP, Intergrated Housing, Council Meeting System, and introduction of GIS in the Development Plan and Project Management software in Water/Drainage Capital Schemes.

The County Council continues to be confronted by the need for improvements in the range and quality of services that it delivers, which must be achieved without resort to undue costs. This involves the need to ensure value for money, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability.

In this regard studies have taken place on the operation of the Mechanical Section and Housing Maintenance Section. Examination of the conclusions of the Report of the former has been chosen by the union to be dealt with in an industrial relations forum. The County Council referred the matter for Conciliation in November 2007.

The recommendations of the Housing Maintenance Report are scheduled for discussion between a High Level Group of senior management and union officials with a view to progressing this change through the local Partnership Committee.

However, despite major reports being completed covering the areas of the Mechanical Section and Housing Maintenance, it has proved almost impossible to get the Trade Unions to engage with the Council management in an effort to see if agreement can be reached on restructuring arrangements. The Council is facing a similar situation in relation to developments in the household waste collection sector, following the entry of a private operator into the market. The Council's direct labour service is characterized by service deficiencies and chronic inefficiencies. It has proved very difficult to get the Trade Unions to engage with management in relation to the rationalization of the Council's direct labour operation with a view to addressing these service and efficiency issues.

There are historical practices and agreements in existence concerning working arrangements such as working in the rain, overtime and payment of differentials. The High Level Group is scheduled to consider such arrangements, while the initiation of a job profiling exercise for outdoor staff will facilitate the banding of General Operative posts and facilitate multi skilling and the elimination of differentials, of which there are approximately 80 currently in existence.

An issue to be addressed in T2016 is the development of shared services in local authorities. There are a number of existing instances of shared services among the Dublin local authorities in the areas of Emergency Services, Waste Management and Water Treatment, for example. There are currently areas such as payroll and superannuation that could be shared within the Region and while no progress has been made locally the Local Government Management Services Board are considering a Centre of Excellence model for superannuation services.

Progress in shared services has been made in that agreement was reached with Dublin City Council whereby it will provide a full traffic signal service to the County Council and an interchange of posts with the City Council will facilitate this.

An Audit Committee is being set up pursuant to the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006. The function of the Committee, inter alia, will be to review financial and budgetary processes, foster best practice in the internal audit function, review

auditors' reports, assess and promote efficiency and value for money, review risk management systems and make appropriate recommendations within its remit.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that I am very appreciative of the important work carried out by the Partnership Committee. I would also welcome greater engagement by the Unions and staff in the partnership process to address significant change management issues within the organization.

As can be seen from the above, some progress and change continues to be achieved by the County Council.

While a stable industrial relations climate exists in relation to matters covered by the Agreement I am concerned that full co-operation with the implementation of the modernization agenda set out in Towards 2016 has not been forthcoming from the direct labour unions.



Owen P. Keegan
County Manager
14th December 2007