



15th December, 2007.



Ms. Chris Gavigan,
Assistant Chief Executive,
Local Government Management Services Board,
Local Government House,
35-39 Ushers Quay,
Dublin 8.

Re: Performance Verification Under Towards 2016
(June 2007 – February 2008)

Dear Ms. Gavigan,

I refer to your letter of the 31st October, 2007, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to report progress in the Kildare Local Authorities (The Authorities). For this purpose I also enclose the checklist, with comments against the indicators listed.

The growth of Kildare continues to provide challenges and opportunities for local government and the Authorities in the delivery of a multitude of services to a growing and increasingly diverse public. The Authorities strive to improve service delivery to the public through enhanced links with local communities, ongoing change and modernisation of work practices and better use of information technology.

Planning and Development

As positively reflected in the Service Indicators Report for 2006 the Authorities arranged regular Planning clinics for one off housing applications, and information meetings for Consultants and Architects. Staff have co-operated with the immediate validation of Planning Applications at the counter (500 approximately since September 2007). A Web based access to the full Planning system has been rolled out in 2007. Through the planning process the Authorities have facilitated the government's decentralisation programme, also engaged with the Department of Education and Science in identifying suitable sites and buildings for the provision of schools throughout the county, and efficient processing of planning applications for new schools/extensions. Staff have co-operated fully with an accelerated programme of the 'Taking in Charge' of residential housing estates and in doing so have restored staff morale and the confidence of the public in the system.

Health and Safety & Welfare

The Health & Safety Act of 2005 places increased emphasis on providing records showing method statements and risk assessments for all works undertaken by the council. Method statements and Risk Control templates have been prepared in co-operation with Meath and Wicklow County Council; Kildare – Roads, Meath - Water Services, Wicklow – Environment. Detailed risk assessments in Water Service installations are ongoing and prioritised.

In addition to the provision of mobile welfare facilities through the Partnership process for area works, welfare facilities are now being provided for all new Capital Schemes.

The Authorities have also implemented an '*Employee Well Being Programme*' providing a 24 hour/7 day confidential independent employee service offering information, support and assistance to employees dealing with the stress and challenges of life and work. It is anticipated that this will assist in reducing stress and absenteeism.

The Health & Safety Award to Council for the Osberstown Waste Water Treatment Plant is evidence of continued commitment to achieving and sustaining the highest Health & Safety Standards.

National Disability Strategy

The Authorities have appointed a full time Access Officer to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Disability Act, 2005 and ensure the delivery of the objectives set out in our Disability Strategy (DARA Plan - Delivering Access Rights for All), which has been recognised and given awards nationally.

Access Audits have been completed, and an Implementation Plan will be published by year end in consultation with local access groups. We have undertaken to train staff to a recognised Certificate standard from the University of Ulster to ensure staff development and ongoing sustainability. There is continuing training for staff on Disability Awareness.

The Authorities continue to make improvements in the built environment to provide accessibility to public facilities such as library entrances and the installation of special lifts and ramps to facilitate access to the buildings by members of staff and public. I am pleased to report that our Library in Leixlip was awarded the Excellence Through Accessibility Award presented by the NDA this month.

A "style" guide for accessible documents has been prepared and piloted in three departments in 2007, to ensure consistency in presentation of information for the public. This will be rolled out to all Departments in first quarter of 2008. Department of Environment Sectoral Funding is prioritised through consultation processes with our Disability Forum, staff and local representatives.

The Authorities strive to meet the needs of staff with special identified needs, and to comply with the minimum employment level for people with disabilities.

Co-operation with use of technology

There is Increased use of telemetry in relation to mains water supplies and water metering. The use of GIS as a tool to manage information on the network is in place for water and will be extended to waste waterworks.

There is a craftworkers and general operatives agreement to the use of technology, mobile phones, hand held terminals and other IT equipment. Road opening licensing technology is now available to engineers and outdoor supervisory staff. This system involves the use of hand held technology linking to a central database. Computers are now installed in area offices for use by Overseers – where they can access various systems. Appropriate training has been provided. Technical competence has been expanded in Area Offices, particularly in relation to Health and Safety Requirements, interaction with community on development and infrastructural issues, and increased demand across the operation of roads and streetscape improvements.

Call out arrangements – there are agreed protocols in all instances and full co-operation in that regard, e.g. Ice Cast technology. This technology is in place in wintertime in co-operation with area engineers, and protocols are in place for call out crews.

Information Technology

The Authorities recognise the benefits of using ICT to introduce efficiencies into the work process while delivering better service to the public. The major initiatives in 2007 included increased use of scanning of documents to decrease the paperwork overhead, introduction of an online travel and subsistence application for staff, implementation of a number of GIS based applications, particularly in the Planning area, the development of small systems, for example, pollution control system for the Environment Section and the introduction of PCs/Terminals in the building to facilitate public enquiries and services.

On a practical level, a 27% increase in applicants in the county availing of the on-line motor tax service reflects the growing willingness and capacity of the public to utilise e-services.

On e-procurement, the main initiative in 2007 has been the introduction of Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) into the payment process. This was successfully piloted to facilitate electronic Travel and Subsistence payments to staff, and is in the process of being rolled out to all staff and external suppliers.

Capital Projects

The Roads Programme for 2008-2010 has been substantially increased on the capital side to €803.8M and the Water Services Capital Programme for the next three years is €207.5M, which is clearly an indication of the level of activity that is ongoing. There are clear implications for enhancing project management skills and for embracing new systems of work as these become available, e.g. Design/Build model as used on the N7 and the N9/N10. The Design, Build & Operate model has also been employed in Water Services, whereby the Sludge Handling facility (€16 million) has been constructed as a DBO. There is general acceptance by staff, following full consultation through the Partnership process, that further new water treatment plants may be delivered under similar DBO processes. Staff have embraced these procedures which in turn has been reflected in the delivery of projects on time and within budget. The extent to which the staff are involved in actively project managing and delivering these schemes is a testament to the greater levels of efficiency which have and are continuing to be achieved.

Overall the Capital Programme proposed for three years 2008- 2010, which is subject to government funding allocation, will see investment across the entire county in every aspect of the Authorities services.

Training and Development

The demands on the provision of services reflects the need for a modern flexible, multi-skilled work force and training schemes are tailored accordingly. Particular attention is being paid to developing management skills at middle and senior management grades.

Participation in training and upskilling are key elements in the service provision delivery, and the continued co-operation and participation of staff in training programmes is providing a trained, flexible workforce, driven by the Performance Management Development System process.

A significant programme of training is ongoing through the regional training centre at Ballycoolin, where Kildare is one of the 7 local authorities sharing services and Kildare is one of the highest users of the service.

The council is committed to the Return to Learning Programme for outdoor workers, and has followed this up with Computer Skills Training.

Efficient use of resources.

The library service New Stock acquisition policy and procedures reflect multi-cultural and access needs, and the proportion of loans in these categories increased to 33% of total loans from January – September 2007.

The outsourced pay parking system in operation in Newbridge has now been expanded to Kildare Town, Celbridge and Leixlip.. It is intended to expand this outsourced service to Maynooth and Kilcock in 2008. This system is self-funding and surplus funds are used for capital type improvements to the towns parking management and traffic infrastructure. In addition to parking regulation litter enforcement duties are now being carried out by private sector wardens on a pilot basis in Newbridge since October, 2007. It is intended to extend this to all towns patrolled by private sector wardens in 2008. In relation to the foregoing full co-operation has been achieved through a consultation process.

The Local Authority Tender Book has been replaced with the Local Authority Quotes system in October 2007. Staff co-operated fully with the training programme and implementation of the new system. The Authorities are also preparing a Corporate Procurement Plan to ensure improved efficiencies and Value For Money across the Authorities.

The Authorities have also introduced a "Help Text Service", which allows citizens to text a message to the Emergency Control Centre in relation to problems with roads, water and sanitary services. We will reply to any text and then keep the sender involved as to the response to the problem.

We have developed a strong Estate Management Team. Significant progress is being made in developing relationships with community groups and communities generally through the work of this section. Considerable resources have been committed to this process and the focus of this work is to involve marginalized groups in a developmental, social inclusion process, encourage self help and encouraging people to develop to their true potential. For example, in our new scheme of 125 social units in Rosconnell, Newbridge a dedicated community worker is based on site to assist with integration of the community into the development of their estate. As a further example, in a proposed regeneration project in Rathangan, consultation has taken place with local residents associations, local councillors and council staff on the requirements of the area. The Authorities actively pursues the involvement of people who have been marginalized and excluded, and this work on the ground is essential to securing their involvement.

Fire Service Change Programme

In the Fire Services, the recent restructuring process has been welcomed in terms of the technical competence needed for the service. There are four "Pillars" to the Change programme:

1. Competency based training and qualification process. This will align the training of Fire Personnel to the National Qualification programme under FETAC and HETAC. A Senior Asst. CFO seconded to this project Team.
2. Safety, Health and Welfare. A consultant has been appointed to re-examine Health and Safety Policy in the Fire Service in light of issuing by the DOEHLG of new template for ancillary safety statement for the Fire Service.
3. Community Fire Safety. Having completed the programme as envisaged by the Department for year 2007, it is proposed to roll this on and continue this project in future years.
4. Fire Cover Standards. In relation to National Emergency management the Major Emergency Management Programme has been completed in 2007 in accordance with pre agreed target dates and in 2008 training and exercises will be undertaken to complete the preparedness section of the Major Emergency Framework. The County Risk Management process will be ongoing with a view to completing the Pre-fire Planning Programme for the county in 2008.

Performance Management & Development System

Implementation of PMDS has been completed across the organisation. Training requirements have been identified through PDP'S and Departmental Plans and Team Plans established in each Section. All Departments have commenced reviews of departmental, team and personal development plans, taking account of the work programme planned in the Budget for 2008.

Partnership


Progress has continued on the process of *Deepening Partnership in the Workplace*. Workplace Partnership Structures are in place with departmental Sub groups in place in almost all areas, addressing the issues that arise in the sections/departments. The high level Handling Significant Change Through Partnership group is progressing..

Conclusion

The foregoing outlines the extent to which the modernisation and change programme has been and is continuing to be comprehensively pursued in Kildare Local Authorities in the spirit of Partnership. At all levels elected representatives and staff are fully committed to the continuous improvement of public service delivery for our citizens.

I am satisfied that Kildare Local Authorities – members and staff have embraced and advanced the '*Modernisation programme for Local Government*' and '*Towards 2016*' and are ready to meet the new challenges and opportunities arising from the counties strategic location adjacent to the greater Dublin area. To conclude our focus is to enhance the quality and delivery of service to the public we serve.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Malone.
County Manager