



Tel: + 353 (0) 42 933 5457

Fax: + 353 (0) 42 933 4549

Louth County Council
Comhairle Chondae Lughal
"Opening doors to a brighter future"

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY MANAGER

County Hall
Halla an Chontae

Millennium Centre
Ionad na Milaoise

Dundalk
Dún Dealgan



Mr. Chris Gavigan
Mr. Matt Merrigan
Joint Chairs
LANPAG
35-39 Ushers Quay
Dublin 8

14/7/2008

Re: Performance Verification under Towards 2016 (March 2008 – August 2008)

Dear Joint Chairs

I refer to the above matter and also completed Checklist under the above process. I can also confirm that this Checklist has been signed by the Joint Chairs of the Local Partnership Committee at its most recent meeting.

Using the Checklist format I have listed specifically the progress that has been achieved in this reporting period. With regard to previous reporting periods, it is areas where new projects or initiatives are being advanced under the themes and objectives of Towards 2016 or where processes have been halted for various reasons which are indicated specifically. Such instances which relate specifically to the Towards 2016 progress have been set out in that agreement. Utilising the format suggested I outline the progress that has been achieved under the following headings.

Enhanced Customer Service

During this period there have been a number of extensions of opening hours to public offices including an additional two hours per week in the County Library Service and increased opening hours in Housing and Finance in Dundalk Town Council which currently includes full lunch time opening. It is hoped to extend the opening hours of Motor Tax HQ in Louth before the end of 2008. Aspects of this progress have been achieved through the development of a new, extended flexi-time scheme through Partnership under the Handling Significant Change Programme.



We are also undertaking further development of e-services in Louth Local Authorities through our web site with the co-operation of staff, such as e-tickets in Dundalk Town Theatre and online payment for both Control of Dogs Act offences and Litter Pollution Act offences. All public consultations whether statutory or non-statutory can also be responded to via an e-consult forum, providing additional opportunities for participation to the general public.

Co-operation with other Agencies

During this period economic development groups have been established with all relevant agencies, along with elected members and other partners to bring forward and implement Economic Development Plans for both Dundalk and Drogheda. An over-arching draft economic development plan for the county at large is being prepared at present.

Linkages are in place with bodies such as SEI, local authorities, cross border authorities and An Garda Síochána (through the Joint Policing Committee Initiative), all of which will ultimately progress the goals of the local authority and improve service delivery for the citizens of the County.

Development of Shared Services

A number of initiatives have been established to ensure that the goal of organising and consolidating the delivery of services is achieved. I am pleased to say that a number of services are already being delivered on a County-at-Large basis including Human Resources, Industrial Relations and the Arts Service. At the end of this reporting period I expect to be in a position to say that the additional services of housing capital, fire services and water services will be operating on a similar vein. For the present at least, the main emphasis in relation to development of Shared Services will be on this type of County-at-Large approach.

Staff Training

Currently across the Louth Local Authorities training is continuing on a similar basis to the last number of years as evidenced by the data reported under the National Service Indicators arrangement. To ensure that the training provided is effective it is essential that the correct training is delivered at the correct time to the correct grades of staff and that all training originates from the Performance Management Development System Process.

In this reporting period a significant number of outdoor employees have been trained and provided with the necessary Driving Licence and following successful completion of Department of Transport driving tests to provide the Council with a sustainable pool of drivers and to provide promotional outlets for some staff.

With regard to the PMDS model, a review is currently underway in the 7 directorates/town councils in relation to the implementation of PMDS to ensure that the system is being used to its full potential and that maximum benefit is being gained by the Councils from the process. I anticipate that this review will bring about an increased emphasis on teams and Team Development Plans as opposed to Personal Development Plans and will also help ensure that PDPs are completed by the appropriate line manager.

Organisational Change and Innovation under Towards 2016

A consistent goal under the theme of modernisation and flexibility is to remove all outdated work practices. In our current discussions with the fire service for example we are seeking to replace these with modern and innovative practices to ensure the delivery of a modern proactive fire service for County Louth. It is our goal to ensure for example that operational fire fighters engage in planning, risk assessments, hydrant inspections and school visits in order to have a structured, planned response when incidents arise. This ongoing review, which will still take some time to complete, is taking place through the partnership process under the Handling Significant Change protocol. Other areas being examined under the Handling Significant Change protocol include :

- Water Services
- On-Call Allowance
- Flexi-time
- Mobility Policy
- Family Friendly Policies

Other changes and innovations have already been put in place under this theme, including:

- The co-ordination and delivery of improved and additional services to relevant housing tenants.
- Repositioning of a number of staff to ensure better service delivery, including the anti-social behaviour officers who have been relocated to the towns with the greatest population and greatest instances of anti-social behaviour
- The consolidation, streamlining and partial relocation of the arts services for the whole county
- New practices and procedures have also been put in place with regard to the surface dressing of roads.

It would be the intention over the coming months to ensure that the time and attendance system which is now in place in all indoor offices is extended as appropriate to outdoor work locations.

Value for Money/Efficiency/Effectiveness

We continue at all times and particularly in the current economic climate to ensure that services are delivered in an efficient and effective manner. Some recent examples of steps taken to meet this goal include the restructuring of Directorates to ensure most efficient use of resources for example housing capital schemes and the provision of the Arts, and enhanced co-operation between Town and County through the handling significant change protocol.

In addition the contracting out of some services previously undertaken by in house staff. These services included grass cutting in some locations and housing maintenance across the Louth Local Authorities. The achievement of value for money is also assisted by strict adherence to the Corporate Procurement Plan in relation to the purchasing and tendering.

Outstanding Issues

Despite the progress outlined above there are a number of issues which are of concern and which mitigate against the achievement of some of the actions outlined above including customer service delivery.


As indicated in previous action plans there has been a number of efforts made to deliver the Fire Service Action Plan as outlined in the original agreement. Meetings are ongoing on a monthly basis but I am still not in a position to report that the full terms have been agreed or implemented.

Discussions relating to the introduction of an on-call system for the County involving greater co-operation between Town and County authorities is not progressing as quickly as expected and has led to a number of difficulties relating to existing practices. All efforts are being made by both sides to progress the matter.

Conclusion

I am satisfied that considerable efforts are being made by all parties to achieve modernisation, efficiency and better quality service to the public. However I have not been able to make satisfactory progress on the Fire Service Action Plan and therefore am not in a position to recommend payment for full-time fire service and retained fire service personnel within the two towns of Drogheda and Dundalk.

Yours faithfully,



Conn Murray
County Manager