

**Local Government National Partnership Advisory Group
35 -39 Ushers Quay
Dublin 8**

14th December, 2007

**FAO : Ms Chris Gavigan, Joint Chair
Mr Matt Merrigan, Joint Chair**

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

Dear Chris and Matt,

I refer to your letter of 31st October, 2007, with respect to the above, and your request that each of:

- Checklist as per template supplied
- Separate narrative report

be completed and returned to you.

Attached please find check list in the form requested. I can confirm that the checklist was completed following meeting of full Partnership committee on 14th November, 2007, a subsequent meeting of a sub-group of the Partnership committee on 28th November, 2007, and most recent the meeting of the Partnership Committee on Wednesday, 12th December, 2007. I can also confirm that the checklist has been signed by the Joint Chairs of the Partnership committee.

At the outset, I am pleased to concur with the Partnership committee that 'Verifiable Progress since June 2007' can be identified in 21 of the 22 indicators identified by LANPAG and the PVG as the appropriate mechanism for identifying specific incremental progress in complying with the relevant provisions of the *Towards 2016* Social Partnership agreement.

You will appreciate that, as with any group of indicators, the range of compliance can vary to a significant extent. However it is clear from the attached checklist that there has been significant positive engagement by all sections of the workforce.

In this context, it is important to note the operating environment that Meath experiences, particularly in relation to its location, in close proximity to Dublin, and consequent resultant factors such as rapidly increasing population (as quantified in last census) as well as difficulty in competing with Dublin as location for new employment opportunities.

The net effect of this operating environment is that over time Meath County Council is both expected and required to provide a greater service with finite resources.

My last letter to you of April, 2007, pointed out the situation in relation to constraints imposed on our desired operating environment, in the context of both financial resources available to the council, as well as the cap on approved staff numbers as advised by the DoEHLG. Both these factors tend to prevent the Council from engaging to the extent it would desire, in fully undertaking some of the indicators as identified in your checklist, (eg provision of extended opening hours in offices with small staff compliment). However, it can be agreed that these constraints also force the council and staff to embrace some of the other indicators identified (eg redeployment of staff, outsourcing, better use of IT).

In this context, the Council is constantly considering these operations which are best delivered centrally, and those which are best delivered through the network of area offices and One Stop Shops, which have been provided in each of Duleek, Dunboyne, Ashbourne, Kells and Trim, as well as existing Navan Town Council and Area, as well as County Hall.

Maintaining such a significant number of offices (and providing a significant range of front-line services, as per the BLG philosophy of providing as many services as possible at a local level) is a demand that few other local authorities experience.

Combining these factors, and the previous point with respect to service demands of the population necessitates that the staff of Meath Local Authorities demonstrate the characteristics as identified in the indicator checklist received.

I am satisfied that, in the main, staff are co-operating with various initiatives, and would point to examples of each of the following:-

- Enhanced Customer Service
 - reception desk now opens 30 mins before normal starting time, and opens through lunch hour
 - planning department consolidated and centralisation process underway, extended opening hours agreed in principle, and to be implemented shortly
 - award winning IT site

- Co-operation with other Agencies
 - Interagency group for traveller accommodation
 - Working with Irish Rail to develop rail link to Navan

- Tourism Development projects

- Development of services
 - outdoor crews from Areas and Town Councils now working across area boundaries
 - integration of each of 3 Town Councils payroll to MCC payroll
 - Meath County Council to undertake HR, and Superannuation for each Town Council

- Staff Training/PMDS
 - Training delivered in accordance with plan – mandatory, required and voluntary
 - In house IT system, PDP's to be completed online (as with Annual leave and payroll)
 - Outdoor – specific training identified and provided

- Organisational change and innovation under *Towards 2016*
 - management propose to close machinery yard, and redeploy approx 30 staff to other areas of organisation
 - planning department to centralise ; also fundamental review of operation
 - BPI commenced in Housing department
 - Surface dressing operations partially undertaken by private contractors
 - Request for expressions of interest for provision of turnkey operation for Housing Department

- Value for Money/Efficiency/Effectiveness
 - Proposal to reduce number of payroll runs
 - Examination of provision of fleet vehicle vs payment of expenses
 - avoidance of duplication of services through function/directorate and area

I would welcome the opportunity to expand on the items above during the proposed site visits in the coming year.

Notwithstanding the fact that the checklist was completed, and signed by each Joint Chair of the Partnership Committee, I must point out that in the course of discussion, some of the union members of the committee were unable to agree that under the outsourcing heading that the issue of Meath County Council utilizing road surfacing contractors to lay surface dressing on DBM be included.

I am happy to report that I can confirm that there has been co-operation with the implementation of the modernisation agreement as set out in the agreement, and that a stable industrial relations climate exists in relation to any matter covered by the agreement.

Accordingly, I recommend that the pay increase of 2.5%, due with effect from 1st March, 2008, and dependant on verification of compliance with the requirements of *Towards*

2016 for the 9 month period June 2007 to February 2008, be approved for employees of Meath Local Authorities.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Dowling
County Manager