

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE MHUINEACHÁIN MONAGHAN COUNTY COUNCIL

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An Gleann,
Muineachán.



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12th December 2007

Ms. Chris Gavigan
Joint Chair,
LANPAG
LGMSB
35-39, Usher's Quay,
Dublin 8.



Re: Action Plan/Progress Report - Towards 2016

Dear Ms. Gavigan,

I enclose, herewith, completed Action Plan/Progress Report for the period 1st June 2007 to 28th February 2008 and indicator checklist. The report covers the activities of the County Council and the five Town Councils. It was prepared in consultation with the local Partnership Committee.

I am satisfied that real progress is being made under each of the specific actions detailed in the report with the full co-operation of staff. I set out below some of the more recent achievements of Monaghan Local Authorities in this regard.

Enhanced Customer Services

Monaghan Local Authorities have introduced a number of initiatives over recent years and continues to improve on these. The following are some examples of new and enhanced customer services progressed in 2007:

Planning

Whilst pressure on service delivery in the area of development control has peaked, Monaghan County Council continues to provide a dedicated reception team for planning enquiries, lunchtime opening hours, over 1,700 individual planning clinics per year, enhanced planning website facility with daily updates of applications and interactive aerial photography and mapping.

Community &
Enterprise
(047) 38140

Environment
(047) 30593

Finance
(047) 30589

Fire/Building Control
(047) 30521

Higher Education
Grants
(047) 30550

Housing Construction
(047) 30529

Housing Loans/Grants
(047) 30527

Motor Taxation
(047) 81175

Personnel
(047) 30586

Planning
(047) 30532

Register of Electors
(047) 30547

Roads
(047) 30597

Water Services
(047) 30504

In October 2007, the Council hosted a series of educational/consultative fora tailored to the needs to developers and architects and their request for interaction with the Planning Service. The interactive sessions were designed to improve the quality of planning applications and share with architects the criteria applied by planners when assessing projects and to give planners an insight into the environment and conditions the local construction industry operates under. The four Town Councils have this month launched online scanned copies of all historical planning documents and drawings in relation to each planning application in each town (since 1964).

January 2008 will see the completion of work on the upgrading of the G-Plan service, and offer architects and developers online access to details and mapping of all public and private water and sewerage networks throughout the county.

Water Services

Early completion of the water metering project throughout the county in 2006 facilitated the development of a meter-based billing system for water and waste-water usage on a single integrated invoice, which was first issued in July 2007. Metered billing for water and waste water services are now integrated with a single invoice issued twice yearly, providing transparency and improving customer service and cash-flow.

Co-operation with other agencies

Monaghan County Council has co-operated with many other agencies over the years and continues to do so in the operation of its day to day business. Among the most recent and innovative examples are:

Housing

Monaghan County Council's Housing section is presently developing a Service Level Agreement with the Health Service Executive and Monaghan Housing Association to define the role and responsibilities of each body for supported housing projects developed for persons with an intellectual disability. The SLA will define procedures and responsibilities in relation to Rent Payments; Tenure; Allocations; Support levels and care provision; Housing Management; Insurance and Repairs and Maintenance. It is intended to develop a model in Monaghan that can be replicated throughout the rest of the country

Community & Enterprise

Monaghan County Council has the largest geographic border with Northern Ireland and has developed many links with local authorities and development agencies in the north. Monaghan has been highly successful in obtaining approval for cross-border economic, community, infrastructural and social investment.

However, the announcement of approval for the reopening of the Ulster Canal from Belturbet to Clones on November 2007, is a direct result of the

linkages developed over the years with Fermanagh District Council, local community groups and interest groups such as Ulster Waterways and Inland Waterways. Monaghan County Council has met with Waterways Ireland, the project overseers, to advance the project through the procurement and planning stages and in parallel establish an economic entity to attract investment and develop facilities and tourism activity in the corridor along the route of the canal.

Monaghan County Council has also recently participated with Dungannon and District Council, Armagh City Council and their respective local Chambers of Commerce to produce a joint advertising campaign, (including television), to encourage local shopping in the run-up to Christmas. All three towns experience leakage due to their proximity to larger retail centres (Craigavon, Sprucefield, Dundalk and Newry) and this campaign highlights the benefits and attractions of small independent retail shops.

Development of Shared Services

As stated in previous reports, Monaghan Local Authorities have carried out considerable work on the area of shared services, with the County Council and four Town Councils operating shared housing waiting lists and construction programmes, shared processing of payroll, rates accounting, and shared planning , ICT and HR services.

Finance

In attempting to extend the “Bill Pay” service to housing rent collection in the four towns in 2007, the Town Councils were notified by An Post that it was unwilling to provide the service for small accounts. Monaghan County Council is now operating the service, under its account, on behalf of the four Town Councils.

Staff Training/PMDS

Staff training in 2007 accounts for 5.6% of revenue expenditure. Monaghan County Council has, in 2007, introduced a formal induction training programme for all new employees, to familiarise them with the general terms and conditions of employment, support services available, rules and procedures of the Council and responsibilities of each employee. An informal induction also takes place within the assigned section.

Currently HR and IS sections are developing a training database which will use PMDS and PDP data to establish training needs and patterns within the organisation. This will also help formulate the training programme.

Organisational change and innovation under T2016

Water Services

In accordance with the Local Government Act 2001, Monaghan County Council took charge of the management of the water services for the four town councils within the county. Monaghan County Council took advantage of the legislative change to rationalize the water services operation and maintenance function throughout the county, merging the functions and staffing of the four urban sanitary authorities with the existing rural authority staff, sharing duties, responsibilities and providing cover. Town Council staff transferred to Monaghan County Council and a seven day week countywide cover service was implemented. These changes were the subject of protracted negotiations with the Union which concluded with an agreement on new staff contracts that came into force in July 2007. The new arrangement provides for a single integrated, management structure providing clear areas of responsibility and service levels, greater flexibility, efficiencies, security and appropriate responses to emergency situations.

Human Resources

The new time and attendance system is scheduled for implementation in tandem with the roll-out of the flexitime and lunch-hour opening throughout the organization in February 2007. The system is being implemented in advance of, but using the same supplier as, the new LGCSB HR, Payroll and Superannuation system, throughout all the local authorities.

Value for money/efficiency/effectiveness

Planning

The launch this month of historical planning application details and mapping data for each of the four towns, offers a unique online service to architects, developers, solicitors and the general public. However the service will provide greater efficiencies for each of the four Town Councils, reducing telephone and counter queries and requests for copies of correspondence and plans from historical files.

Finance and Corporate

As part of an ongoing value for money review, Monaghan County Council engaged P.S.A. Consulting to analyse expenditure on four areas - electricity, telephony, stationery and printing. The subsequent report in October 2007, identified potential savings of in excess of €80,000 annually, simply by switching suppliers, amending current contractual arrangements and consolidating purchasing and ordering. The recommendations of this report were implemented immediately.

Monaghan County Council was the pilot for a new Low Value Purchase Card system throughout the year. The roll out of the extended system has proved very successful with over 21% of all purchase transactions representing 0.24% in money value being processed this way.

Workplace Partnership

The Workplace Partnership structure continues to develop and through the various working groups has provided a framework resulting in more dialogue and teamwork. Consultation and agreement in relation to service delivery options for a number of major water services investment projects was completed in September 2007. Partnership is active and supportive in a number of ongoing initiatives including the relocation of the Machinery Yard, provision of new Civic Offices and integration of County and Town Council services.


Conclusion

The above is an overview of a number of areas where Monaghan Local Authorities continue their programme of modernisation in response to the changing demands of its customers. Greater detail on these and other issues are set out in the progress report.

With regard to the previously agreed modernisation and change programme, I wish to confirm that staff are cooperating fully with its implementation.

I also wish to confirm also that stable industrial relations continue within the Council. Issues arising are addressed through Partnership, local negotiation and dispute resolution processes as required.

Yours sincerely



Declan Nelson
Monaghan County Manager