



02/01/08

**Ms. Chris Gavigan,  
Mr. Matt Merrigan,  
Joint Chairs,  
LANPAG,  
Cumberland House,  
Fenian Street,  
Dublin 2.**

18<sup>th</sup> December 2007.  
m/ms

**re: Towards 2016 Progress Report**

Dear Joint Chairs,

I'm returning herewith the Progress Report for the period commencing June 2007 in the agreed reporting template, which has been signed off by the Joint Chairs of the Partnership Committee.

In general terms, I am pleased to be able to report progress in the context of this Council's commitment towards the objectives contained in Towards 2016. The following list of initiatives is indicative of progress made.

In relation to Customer Service, Westmeath County Council commenced construction of its new Civic Offices in October 2007. The 7000 sq. m. office complex will cost €40m and will provide for considerable enhancements in Customer Service. In the latter part of the year, the Council commissioned a review of its telephone service, developed an automated customer contact management system, completed a pilot programme in relation to the development of an on-line planning service, and engaged in an extensive consultation process as part of its review of the County Development Plan. The most significant area of progress in relation to Customer Services during 2008 and in particular, during the reporting period, has been in the area of sport and recreation and community development. The following examples are indicative of enhanced links with the community vis-à-vis this area of Customer Service.

- The establishment of a Cathaoirleachs Awards and Community Grants Scheme with a budget of €180,000.

- The adoption of a Recreation and Play Policy and the provision of four playgrounds in Mullingar, Castlepollard, Kilbeggan and Moate.
- The development, in association with the Department of Sport and the F.A.I., of four no. multi-purpose mini-pitches at a cost of €500,000. €360,000 was provided by Westmeath County Council.
- The acquisition of circa 20 acres at a cost of €5m for the development of a major Sports and Recreation Facility in Mullingar, which has now gone to design stage.
- The employment of Community Development Workers in Mullingar and Athlone.
- The long term lease of 20 acres of land to sporting organisations.
- The creation of a €1m Enterprise Promotion Fund
- The employment, in conjunction with the F.A.I., of a Sports Development Officer to work with the marginalized in both Mullingar and Athlone.

The work of the Local Authority is for the most part focused on the development of networks and the promotion of inter-agency co-operation in support of various programmes and policy implementation. Through the work of the County Development Board, Westmeath County Council provides a strong focus for inter-agency co-operation. In addition, ongoing co-operation is required in relation to the Traveller Interagency Group, the Disability Strategy Group, the Midland Gateway Implementation Forum and the Community and Voluntary Fora.

A Shared Services Working Group has been established between Athlone Town Council and Westmeath County Council with a view to a further examination of the potential for the development of shared services. There already exists substantial shared service agreements with Athlone Town Council in relation to Waste Management, Fire Services, Planning Services, H.R., Street Cleaning and Housing. In December of this year, a substantially revised Street Cleaning Programme allocating full responsibility to Athlone Town Council for street cleaning in the environs of the town, was agreed through partnership. An agreement in relation to the provision of ICT services is currently under discussion.

2007 was the first year when a PDP led training plan was agreed through Partnership. 350 internal and 300 outdoor staff attended training courses during 2007 while the percentage spend of training overall is 5%. 95% of staff went through the full PMDS cycle and changes in relation to simplification, review and reporting mechanisms have been put in place for 2008.

Westmeath County Council is continuously looking for ways to improve its efficiency and cost effectiveness. In this context, I would highlight the following:

- During 2007, Westmeath County Council will reduce its current budget deficit by €2m. The budget deficit stood at €6m at December 2005. It has now been reduced to €3.5m.
- The Council has adopted the Handling Significant Change protocol and is currently in the process of progressing cost effective initiatives in the area of Water and Sewerage Caretaking, street cleaning and a review of the on-call system.
- A Shared Services Working Group has been established with Athlone Town Council to establish what further efficiencies can be achieved through the provision of services on a shared basis.
- The development of the new Civic Office complex, although costly, will provide operational savings of circa €400,000 per annum, associated with the servicing of multiple office locations at present.
- The Council, during the reporting period, appointed a new Internal Auditor and she will work closely with the new Audit Committee in ensuring that this authority is operating efficiently.

Westmeath County Council has an active Partnership Committee which is largely responsible for the peaceful industrial relations climate. The Council has adopted the Handling Significant Change protocol and two sub-groups were established during the reporting period on Water Metering and the redeployment of staff arising out of the Design Build Operate Contract for the Mullingar Sewerage Scheme. Both of these sub-groups had positive outcomes. A further three sub-groups on Street Cleaning, Water and Sewerage Caretakers and Housing Maintenance are currently sitting. Disagreement on the on-call system has been referred to the L.R.C.

In summary, I hope this contextual letter and the reporting template provides sufficient information to underpin my recommendation that the next round pay increase be paid to all staff in Westmeath County Council.

Yours sincerely,



**Daniel McLoughlin,**  
**County Manager**