



# HANDLING SIGNIFICANT CHANGE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

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*Local Authority National Partnership Advisory Group*



# Joint Statement by Management and Trade Unions in Local Authorities on Handling Significant Changes through Partnership

## 1. Purpose of Document

The aim of this document is to help managers, trade union representatives and employees working through partnership in local authorities to handle significant changes with confidence. The document lists the types of issues that managers and trade union representatives have identified as being important to address through partnership in the interests of improving services to the public and the quality of working life of managers and employees. The document sets out a framework within which managers and union representatives may raise significant issues and agree on appropriate mechanisms for handling them. The document also sets out a number of supports that may be called on by the parties in the event that difficulties arise.

## 2. Why Important to Address Significant Issues

It has become clear from recent discussions at national level that senior managers and union representatives want to achieve more through partnership than is presently being achieved. It has also become clear from recent reviews of partnership that managers, union representatives

and employees across the local authority system all agree that more can be achieved through partnership than is currently being achieved.

It has become increasingly clear that the extent to which significant benefits will come from partnership will depend on the extent to which the parties are prepared to put significant issues into the partnership process. This document is intended to help the parties to do this by offering an effective framework and effective supports.

## 3. Framework for Raising and Framing Issues

Either management or unions can in the first instance propose any issue for discussion in partnership. The parties then have the option of deciding whether or not to progress an issue within the partnership process or refer it to a more appropriate process, e.g. industrial relations. In order to agree on which issues should be progressed through partnership, management and unions agree that representatives of senior management, senior trade union representatives and members of the partnership committee (joint chairs) should meet on a regular basis e.g. twice to three times annually. The purpose of these senior management- union meetings will be to:

- Share information regarding the challenges



facing the organisation and the parties in the short to medium term

- b) Identify priority issues that management want to progress
- c) Identify priority issues that the unions want to progress
- d) Identify concerns that staff are likely to have
- e) Agree how issues might be best handled i.e. through partnership or industrial relations
- f) Agree how issues should be framed and appropriate terms of reference and who should be involved
- g) Agree resourcing and time frames for addressing issues
- h) Review progress on issues currently being addressed through partnership and industrial relations.

Management and unions will communicate to their constituents regarding agreement on how the issues are going to be handled. This approach should be seen in the context of on-going efforts to improve services, to develop partnership, to improve industrial and employee relations and to enable the organisation to adapt to its changing environment in the spirit of partnership.

#### 4. *List of Significant Issues*

It is not possible to define precisely what constitutes a significant issue. Nevertheless, a number of issues have been suggested by managers and union representatives as falling into this category and they are listed here (this is not intended to be an exhaustive list):

- ✘ Changes in work organization and job design as per Clause 21.5 of Sustaining

Progress and Parallel Benchmarking Agreements.

- ✘ Developing effective human resource policies and practices in areas such as recruitment and selection, induction, training and development, reward and recognitions systems, anti-bullying policies, gender equality policies, family friendly working arrangements, health awareness and testing practices, performance management systems etc.
- ✘ The Policy Framework for Public Private Partnerships (section 4.22 of Sustaining Progress)
- ✘ Improving employee career paths to reward employees and increase motivation
- ✘ Improving the conduct of industrial relations including the operation of grievance and disciplinary procedures and negotiation arrangements, separate and joint management and union training, so as to reduce conflict, improve relationships and create a climate conducive to organizational change
- ✘ Involving employees in the development of corporate plans and strategies
- ✘ Addressing the issue of job security of employees
- ✘ Introducing new organization structures
- ✘ Introducing performance management systems
- ✘ Developing agreed ways of introducing organizational changes and addressing the skills needs of those involved in the change process
- ✘ Introducing value for money initiatives
- ✘ Developing and implementing performance indicators



- ✘ Ensuring that all health and safety requirements are met and exceeded
- ✘ Devising effective means of communicating across entire organizations
- ✘ Improving the physical accommodation available to indoor and outdoor employees.

## 5. *Partnership Processes*

Recent reviews have highlighted the value of partnership as an alternative method of raising and addressing issues to the traditional industrial relations approach. The partnership process is not intended to compromise or undermine in any way the accountability of Managers to decide or determine issues that are clearly their responsibility nor is it intended on the other hand to interfere in any way with the accountability of trade unions to engage the industrial relations machinery and other terms of due process and procedures to represent their members. Instead, it is designed to enhance the operation of both these systems to the extent that the partnership process itself will not work effectively in the absence of good management and IR systems and practices.

The partnership process provides a neutral ground on which Managers can meet staff and their representatives to tease out their various perspectives on the issues facing each and on the opportunities and constraints in changing or improving how things are done. Where there is agreement between management and unions, many issues can be decided and implemented through partnership and in cases where there is no agreement, much progress can be made through partnership to ensure that differences

are resolved in ways which retain the confidence, trust and morale of all staff in the way conflict or differences are managed.

Where there is agreement to have certain matters decided or implemented through partnership the problem-solving aspect of partnership is being seen as one of its main strengths. In this context it will be important for local management and union representatives to be familiar with the two main problem-solving approaches and to become adept in their use:

- ✘ Joint problem solving when there is broad agreement around the necessity for a particular change and where the parties want to work together to find the best solution
- ✘ Interest based problem solving when there is broad agreement around the necessity for a particular change but different interests among management and staff that need to be factored into the pursuit of a best solution.

## 6. *Handling Industrial Relations Issues*

There are well-established local and national industrial relations structures and processes in local government and it is not proposed to interfere with these. There are times, however, when how issues are being handled through industrial relations affects the partnership process. For example, where an issue or part of an issue is moved from partnership into industrial relations it will be important for the partnership committee to be kept informed of progress and to be informed when matters have been brought



to finality. Or where a major industrial relations issue is affecting relationships generally within the workplace it is likely to also affect relationships within the partnership committee. In such a case it will also be helpful for the partnership committee to be kept informed of progress and to be informed when matters have been brought to finality.

## **7. Protocol for Handling Difficulties and Breakdowns**

The parties agree that where an issue being handled through partnership runs into difficulties or discussions break down the following steps should be followed:

1. Where appropriate the services of the local facilitator should be availed of to explore how the situation might be unblocked
2. If the initial in step (1) fails the issue should be referred to the senior management-union meeting, including the joint chairs, which may decide:
  - a) on a mechanism to progress the matter
  - b) to involve an outside facilitator
  - c) to refer the issue to industrial relations or another agreed process
  - d) to refer the matter to LANPAG.
3. Should the mechanism at (a) fail the issue can return to the management/union meeting which may decide to appoint a third party facilitator, refer the matter to the industrial relations process or to LANPAG
4. Should the third party facilitator intervention fail to produce a result the matter may be referred to the industrial relations process or to LANPAG.

The parties undertake to make every effort to seek a workable solution at local level and in any event to continue meetings of the partnership committee without interruption.

## **8. Strengthening Links Between Management Representatives and Senior Management Team**

In order to ensure that there are strong links between management representatives on partnership committees and the senior management team:

1. Partnership issues being handled through partnership will be a standing item on the senior management team meetings agenda (indeed one model being tested is to have the SMT and staff representatives form the County Partnership Committee).
2. The senior management team will receive reports from their representatives on the partnership committee on a regular basis
3. Where the management representatives on the partnership committees are not members of the senior management team they will be invited to update the senior management team on a regular basis
4. Management representatives on the partnership committee will advise colleagues on the management team of the issues being addressed/proposed for partnership and seek their input
5. The senior management team will encourage and support their representatives on the partnership committee.



## 9. *Strengthening Links Between Trade Union Representatives and Trade Union Structures*

In order to strengthen the links between trade union representatives and the trade union structures:

1. Development of partnership and partnership issues will be a standing item on all branch or other relevant union meetings
2. Representatives on partnership committees will report to branch meetings on developments in partnership
3. There should be regular meetings between partnership representatives and full time officials to exchange information with regard to partnership
4. Minutes of partnership meetings should be circulated to union officials and to all local representatives even those not involved on the partnership committee.
5. Union officials should provide support and training for representatives on partnership committees

## 10. *Enlisting the Support of Facilitators in Information & Training*

Partnership facilitators have a key role to play in deepening partnership in local government and in particular in supporting the local partnership committees and sub-committees and in promoting partnership at local level. Partnership facilitators therefore should:

1. Be a key resource to the partnership committees and sub committees in helping to design and manage partnership processes
2. Be a key source of knowledge regarding partnership developments throughout the system
3. Actively promote partnership among staff at all levels through information sharing and by delivering seminars and local training programmes



*Childrens Evening in County Council Chamber*



## 11. The Role of LANPAG in Leading and Supporting the Development of Partnership

It is agreed that in order to enable partnership to deal with significant issues it needs the support and guidance of LANPAG. In particular:

1. LANPAG should make priority funding available to parties that are developing partnership and dealing with significant issues within the framework established here
2. LANPAG should make funding available on an issue by issue basis in order to ensure that the infrastructure and capability is in place to enable partnership to deal successfully with significant issues

3. LANPAG should also put a structure in place to provide support and guidance and where appropriate direction in cases where issues cannot be brought successfully to conclusion locally.
4. LANPAG should work closely with the management side (through the County Manager representatives) and the union side (through their national secretaries/directors) to facilitate contributions to management development and training programmes and union representative training programmes to ensure that management systems and practices and that the conduct of industrial and staff relations reflect the values and principles of the partnership approach.

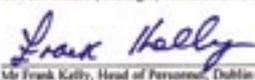
This document was agreed by the following parties

Signed:

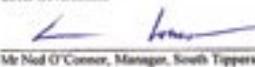
  
Chris Gavigan, LGMSB Joint Chair

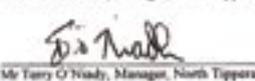
  
Mr Paul Dwyer, Asst. Chief Executive, LGMSB

  
Mr Noel Gleeson, Manager, Limerick Co Co

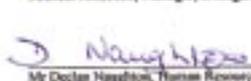
  
Mr Frank Kelly, Head of Personnel, Dublin City Co

  
Mr Aidan Kinch, Dept of Environment, Heritage & Local Government

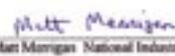
  
Mr Noel O'Connor, Manager, South Tipperary Co Co

  
Mr Terry O'Niady, Manager, North Tipperary Co Co

  
Michael McLoone, Manager, Donegal Co Co

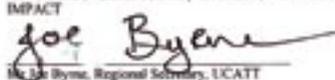
  
Mr Declan Naughton, Human Resource Executive, LGMSB

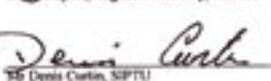
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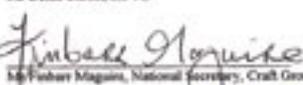
  
Matt Merrigan, National Industrial Secretary (Joint Chair)

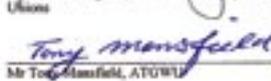
  
Mr Brian Byrd, SIPTU

  
Mr Al Butler, National Secretary for Local Government Division, IMPACT

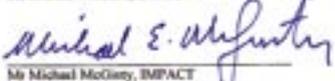
  
Mr J. Byrne, Regional Secretary, UCATT

  
Mr Denis Curran, SIPTU

  
Mr Jimmie Maguire, National Secretary, Craft Group of Unions

  
Mr Tony Mansfield, ATU/WU

  
Mr Michael McCabe, IMPACT

  
Mr Michael McGarry, IMPACT

