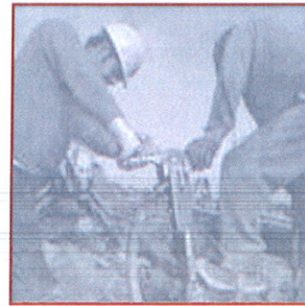


A Framework for Partnership In the Local Authorities

25 February 1999



Message from the Minister for the Environment and Local Government

We are all familiar with the concept of Partnership which, at national level, has been part of the success story of our economic and social progress over the past ten years. It is right, therefore, that we should use this process that works so well at national level in the local workplace also in order to maximise the benefits available, from this process, to all sectors of the public service. As Minister for the Environment and Local Government, I am especially pleased that partnership is now being formally introduced at local authority level. This process will, I am confident, achieve lasting progress, through consensus, with management and staff working together towards a common goal of delivering services of the highest quality to the people of our counties, cities and towns. Partnership is, however, an active and continuing relationship between management, employees and their representatives. There is a role for everybody in the process. It is recognised that the success and development of the partnership approach will depend largely on the extent that management and employees are committed to

the process. To this end I am asking all city and county managers, all employees throughout the local authority service and their union representatives to continue to build upon the commitment shown so far. I congratulate the National Partnership Advisory Group composed of representatives of management and trade unions on their success in producing this framework document and, in this regard, I would also like to pay a special tribute to the facilitator of this process, Ms. Isobel Butler.

Noel Dempsey T.D.,

Minister for the Environment and Local Government

Workplace Partnership in Local Authorities

In December 1996, the social partners agreed "Partnership 2000, for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness", a national agreement for the continued development of an efficient modern economy. A central component of this agreement was a commitment on action to modernise the public service and in this regard Chapter 10 of Partnership 2000 articulates that: "successful change must be based on a partnership approach..... where the objective is to achieve joint ownership by management, unions and staff of the entire process".

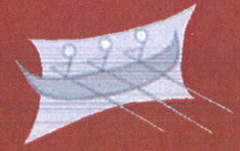
In October 1998, management and unions at national level in the local authority sector commenced discussions on workplace partnership. **A National Advisory Group for Partnership** involving management and union representatives was established to agree a model framework for partnership for implementation in local authorities.

The group retained the services of an independent facilitator to assist in the development and agreement of a partnership framework appropriate to local authorities. The developmental stage of this framework document involved extensive research and the hosting of one national and three regional workshops throughout the country. At these workshops, over 400 management and

union representatives participated in the identification of issues that were considered important for a successful partnership process in the local authority sector. Following this consultative phase, the National Advisory Group in February 1999 endorsed a framework for workplace partnership for the sector.

The National Advisory Group acknowledges and appreciates the involvement and contribution of those local authority employees who participated in the development of the framework. Similarly, the support and expert advice given by Ms Isabel Butler, the facilitator engaged in the process, ensured that the framework document outlines a pragmatic process which should address the concerns of management and unions alike.

The Minister for Environment & Local Government is committed to the development of workplace partnership within the local authority sector and has demonstrated this commitment through the allocation of substantial financial resources to facilitate the implementation of the process.



1. Introduction

This document aims to layout a framework for Partnership within local authorities, drawing on existing models of Partnership within the Public Sector, the experiences of other organisations who have adopted a partnership approach and consultation with Local Authority management and union representatives through the medium of Regional Workshops.

Partnership refers to a new and different type of relationship in the workplace between management, employees and their trade unions. This relationship is characterised by employee participation and consultation, information sharing, the development of joint objectives, co-operation, trust, joint problem-solving and consensus decision making. It provides increased opportunities for employees, at all levels in the organisation, to participate in decision making, recognising and encouraging the important contribution they have to make to enhance development within the organisation.

The challenge for all the stakeholders in Local Authorities is to develop a Partnership which will provide these opportunities for increased employee involvement in decision making, utilise a joint problem solving approach, achieve consensus on the implementation of changes and developments thereby simultaneously improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Local Authorities and meeting the needs of management, unions and employees.

2. What is Partnership: A Definition.

Partnership in the workplace stems from and is described in Partnership 2000, the current national agreement. This agreement does not prescribe a particular model of partnership but in Chapter 10 it describes the objectives of partnership in the Public Service.

"The objective is to achieve joint ownership by management, unions and staff and to replace the adversarial approach to change with an open co-operative process based on effective consultation and participation by all concerned for the progression and implementation of strategic goals, service delivery objectives, and associated action programmes."

The modernisation process, which must be undertaken within the Local Authorities, is also laid out in Chapter 10 of *Partnership 2000*. This process must:

- Face the challenges and demands for change.
 - Have a capacity for strategic management
 - Foster a willingness to respond more rapidly to the changing needs and preferences of the recipients of the local authority services.
 - Improve responsiveness and flexibility in the delivery of services.
 - Provide a concerted and co-ordinated drive to improve the future performance of the Local Authorities at all levels and in all sectors
 - Ensure an improved response to staff aspirations for more fulfilling work and improved career paths and
 - Create an organisational climate conducive to better job satisfaction, motivation and commitment of staff.
- (Extracted from chapter 10, paragraph 10.7 P2000)

Within the Local Authorities themselves there is an agreement and acceptance by both management and unions alike that the development of a partnership approach to this modernisation process presents an opportunity for all stakeholders to gain.

The development of an ongoing dynamic partnership process providing opportunities for direct employee involvement in problem solving and decision making can simultaneously lead to overall improvements in service delivery whilst creating a better working environment for all.

3. The Partnership Structure.

The P2000 agreement highlights the need to put into place "Partnership Structures" which will allow management, unions and employees at all levels to work together in order to develop and implement the action plans which will bring about these changes.

The proposed Partnership Structure would have three levels or components:

A The National Partnership Advisory Group.

B Local Partnership Committees in each Local Authority.

C Partnership Working Groups to work on specific Partnership Projects.

Figure 1. (Overleaf) Illustrates the relationship of these forums to each other.

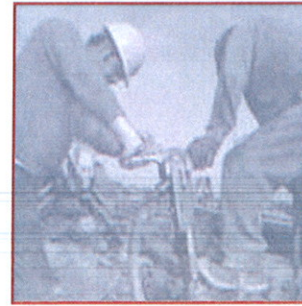
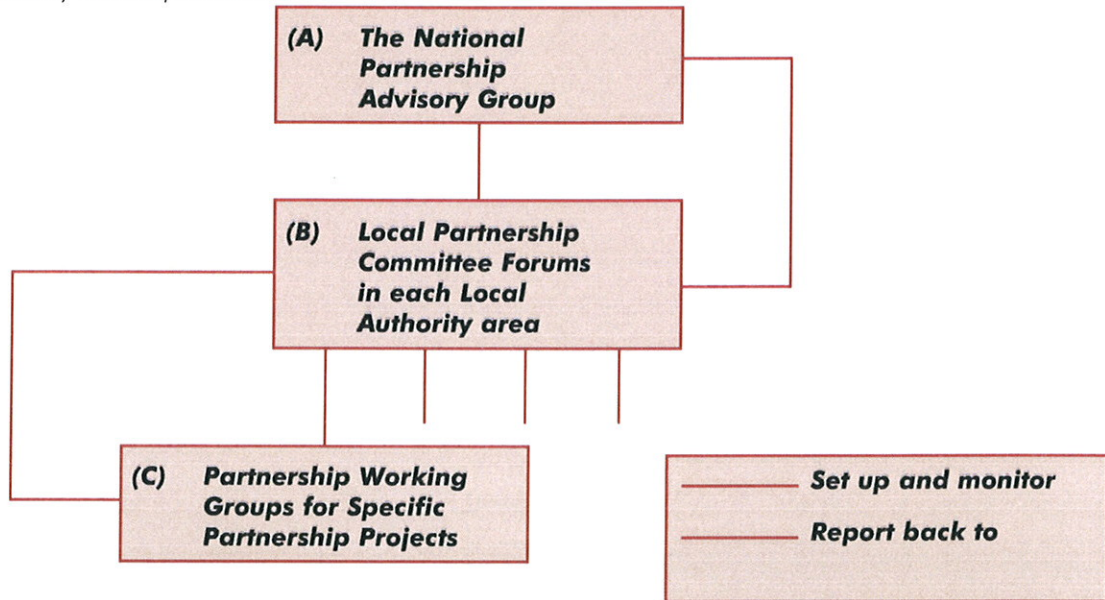
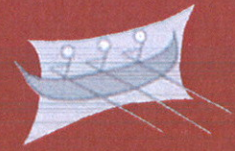


Figure 1: Local Authority Partnership Structures



A. The National Partnership Advisory Group

1. **Group Membership:** This group is a joint union/management group with membership drawn from senior management and union officials from all the unions involved (IMPACT, SIPTU, ATGWU, and the Craft Group of Unions). The Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) have nominated the management representatives to the group and the Trade Unions have nominated their representatives. It is important that this group is truly representative. Group members will have their mandate to participate renewed at regular intervals with due cognisance to the need for continuity of membership.
2. **The role of this group** is to co-ordinate, advise and support each Local Authority in devising its Partnership approach.
 - 2.1. This group will approve a framework document for partnership within the Local Authorities.
 - 2.2. This group will act as a forum for discussion, development and clarification of any partnership issues which arise.
 - 2.3. The group will promote a two-way flow of communication through agreed channels on partnership findings and developments.
 - 2.3.1. Each Local Authority Partnership Committee will communicate regularly with this Group updating it on progress, developments and problems.
 - 2.3.2. The National Partnership Advisory Group will monitor these updates and provide advice and guidance to the Local Committees based on partnership developments and activities in other areas. This will ensure information flow, promote learning and avoid unnecessary duplication.
 - 2.3.3. The group will co-ordinate periodic regional workshops with the aim of promoting networking between partnership committees.
 - 2.4. This group will review, after 1 year, the development of partnership within the Local Authorities.



3. The group will, on behalf of the Local Authorities, liaise with Government Departments (including the Department of an Taoiseach), and all other relevant bodies in order to monitor partnership developments at a national level.
4. **Industrial Relations Procedures and Practices:** This Advisory Group will not replace established industrial relations procedures and practices. Industrial relations issues will be left to the established industrial relations machinery. Where industrial relations issues do arise, the local partnership committee should refer them to the industrial relations forum.
5. **Strong and Visible Leadership:** The success of a partnership approach to change and development depends on the level of participation and commitment of all employees and managers. Strong and visible leadership from both senior management and the unions demonstrating their commitment to the process is necessary in order to achieve this level of commitment at an operational level.

B. The Local Partnership Committee in each Local Authority.

A joint union/management Partnership committee will be set up in each County/County Borough/Local Authority jurisdiction and this could encompass the UDC's and the Corporations.

1. **Composition and Size.**

- 1.1. Each committee will be composed of union, employee and management representatives. Management representatives should be nominated by the Manager and union representatives by the unions. Union representation should not be restricted to union representatives (shop stewards); employees who are union members and who wish to be involved should be included. The widest range of views and experiences within each local authority should be represented on this Committee and that consideration is given to both local needs and interests and operational effectiveness.
- 1.2. A membership of about 8-10 is recommended.
- 1.3. Locally the unions should reach an agreement on how they will be represented on the Partnership Committee.
- 1.4. Efforts should be made to ensure that a gender balance is achieved in the composition of these committees.
- 1.5. Committee members should have their mandate to participate renewed every 24 months. Due cognisance should be given to the issue of ensuring continuity between incoming and outgoing committees.

2. **Responsibilities.**

- 2.1. Each committee should be jointly chaired by the unions and the management and meet on a regular basis. Meetings will need to occur more frequently in the first 6 months as the partnership is developing.
- 2.2. The facility will be provided to allow for the unions and the management to have separate meetings prior to committee meetings if necessary.
- 2.3. A group secretary should be agreed upon and be responsible for recording and circulating the meetings' agenda and minutes.



2.4. Management will supply secretarial backup and other resources for each Committee (e.g. time, training, visits, and library facilities).

2.5. Standing orders: the National Partnership Advisory Group will agree on a set of procedures and ground rules to assist Local Partnership Committees.

3. Role.

3.1. The role of this committee is to effectively manage and steer the process within that Local Authority.

3.1.1. They will do this by creating a forum for the sharing of ideas and information, and the identification of opportunities for partnership and development. Through the use of joint problem solving techniques and consultation with all the stakeholders they will achieve a consensual approach to the implementation of change and development within the local authority with cognisance of the local authority's strategic goals.

3.2. The committee will regularly consult and communicate with local management, employees and their unions and when necessary be responsible for the setting up and monitoring of specific Partnership Working Groups to research, analyse or implement Opportunities for Partnership identified by the committee.

3.3. The Committee will report on a regular basis to the National Partnership Advisory Group.

3.4. At times members of this committee will have to act as facilitators or trainers for partnership activities within their local authority.

4. Actions and Activities.

4.1. Familiarise themselves with the Mission Statement for partnership agreed at National Level.

4.2. Use this mission statement as a guide to help them in identifying and agreeing on Local Objectives for partnership.

4.2.1. Partnership involves an agreement between the stakeholders to work together to achieve joint objectives, which have been agreed between the management, unions and employees. In order to arrive at these common objectives it is important to first recognise and accept that often that some

of the goals that management and their employees have may be conflicting.

4.2.2. In order to arrive at common objectives it may be useful for the management group and the union group to first separately identify and consider their own objectives and then to come together to agree on joint objectives through 'open and frank discussion' thereby arriving at a joint agreement. This approach is most likely to ensure that the joint and agreed upon objectives do not focus exclusively on the objectives of one or other party. Common, agreed upon objectives are most likely to gain the commitment of all to the process.

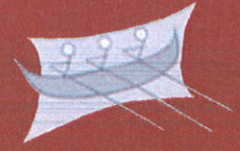
4.2.3. The common objectives should reflect the Local Authority's strategic goals, the concerns of employees and their unions and the specific issues and opportunities in each locality. Examples of issues, which could be tackled, include:

- Health and Safety
- Employment policies e.g. harassment
- Public image of the Local Authorities.
- Strategic plans for service delivery
- Provision of quality service
- Designing less formal hierarchies.
- Customisation of national policies for local level implementation.

(Drawn from "Issues that partnership can Address" identified at The National Partnership Workshop, Dublin November 1998)

4.3. Communication.

4.3.1. This is a central and essential part of any partnership. The Partnership Committee will communicate jointly on a frequent and consistent basis with all employees. Communication will be both verbal and written. Both sides to the partnership will also communicate with their constituent groups. Generating commitment to the process and building trust with all the stakeholders is essential at this stage.



4.3.2. The partnership mission statement will be communicated to all employees, as will the joint objectives, once they are agreed upon.

4.3.3. Communication methods should include regular bulletins, notice boards and Partnership Newsletters. Surveys, Focus Groups, Networks and Small group meetings are other more direct communication methods, which can be used by the partnership committee to consult and get feedback from a wide group of employees.

4.4. Training.

4.4.1. Awareness training will be provided for all employees in each Local Authority.

4.4.2. Joint training will be provided for Partnership committees. Training will be held during working hours.

Communication	Joint Problem Solving	Teamwork
Assertiveness	Leadership Training	Training the Trainers
Facilitation skills	Management skills	Effective meetings
Project management	Strategic Planning	Managing in a Participative environment
Personal development	Consensus Decision making	Effective ways of doing our business

4.4.3. Training topics identified include:

4.4.3.1. Benchmarking of partnership

- gathering information on partnership; perhaps making benchmarking visits to other organisations, which have adopted a partnership approach.

4.5. Local Facilitators: There is a strong recognition and commitment to the concept of local facilitation for Partnership. The Local partnership committee will be responsible for identifying the facilitation needs and deciding on the role, objectives and method of delivery of facilitation within each local authority.

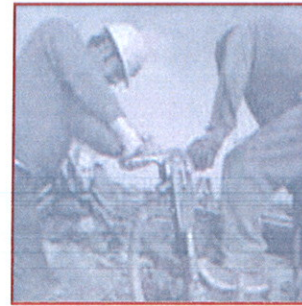
C. Partnership Working Groups

The Partnership working groups will be small task/project focused groups or functional groups which will be set up, when necessary, by the Local Partnership Committee to explore, examine, analyse, research or make recommendations on issues or opportunities which have been identified by the partnership committee.

1. The Local Partnership Committee will select the participants for these working groups and employees from all levels, grades and departments are eligible for inclusion. Usually these employees will be selected on the basis of their area of work, their expertise or knowledge or their experience.
2. The Local Partnership Committee will provide terms of reference to the Partnership Working Group.
3. Training will be provided to ensure that participants have the requisite skills to engage in joint problem solving and consensus decision making.
4. Sufficient human and financial resources will be made available to each Partnership Task Team.
5. The Local Partnership Facilitator will provide facilitation if necessary.
6. The working group will make their report to the Local Partnership Committee.
7. Once the Local Partnership Committee has agreed to an action plan, and consulted with all stakeholders to make them aware of this plan they may delegate responsibility for implementation to partnership Working Groups.
8. The Local Partnership Committee will disband the Partnership Working Group when their task is completed.

4. The Partnership Process

- 4.1. Each Local Partnership Committee will draw up draft Action Plans for their Local Authority. In order to achieve consensus for these action plans the committee may decide to refer them to a Partnership Working Group for detailed consideration or consult with a wider group of employees and managers.
- 4.2. Following either the detailed consideration of a Partnership Working Group or the feedback from wider consultation, the Local Partnership Committee will finalise the action plan and decide on the resources necessary to deliver this plan.



4.3. The Local Partnership Committee will present the finalised Action Plan to all stakeholders.

4.4. The responsibility for the actual implementation of Action Plans may be delegated to Partnership Working Groups who would be answerable to and monitored by the Local Partnership Committee. The Partnership Committee will consult with and report to the National Partnership Advisory Group throughout this process.

5. Verifying Progress

The National Partnership Advisory group shall formally verify progress in relation to implementation of Partnership in Local Authorities.

6. Training within the Partnership Process

Ongoing training is a central part of the Partnership Process. Building Partnership involves fostering a culture, which means that participants will need to acquire new competencies, attitudes and behaviours. Training, time, an opportunity to practice these new competencies and visible top management and union support for the process will all facilitate the development of the new culture.

All participants in the process will be provided with training.

Training will be delivered on a joint basis.

Training interventions will vary from the provision of awareness training to all Local Authority employees and managers to the provision of training for members of Partnership Committees and Working groups which will concentrate on the competencies and skills required for the development of effective Partnership (e.g. Teamworking and group dynamics, project management, effective meeting skills, communication skills, consensual decision making, joint problem solving, report writing, presentation skills).

Facilitation training will be given to ensure that each Local Authority has sufficient facilitators to develop partnership at all levels.

Separate guidelines on training for partnership have been drawn up.

Working and Managing in a Partnership and participative environment requires new competencies and attitudes and training will be required to develop these.

7. Providing Mechanisms to (a) Manage change and (b) Resolve disputes, which have the potential to disrupt partnership during its early development stages.

It is important at this early stage to discuss and agree in a frank and honest manner how to deal with these issues in order to prevent the partnership process from being derailed.

7.1 For instance an agreement should be reached at the level of the National Partnership Advisory Group that:

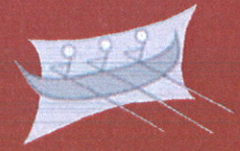
7.1.1. Recognises that within the process of building partnership, local authorities may have to deal with issues and change in a timely manner. In this regard, it is acknowledged that in the public interest management may have to deal swiftly with particular issues. It is accepted that such cases will not be the norm. If such cases occur consultation and information sharing will occur.

7.1.2. Neither the management nor the unions will attempt to slow down the partnership process or hold it to ransom in order to exert pressure in support of either a change in working practices or a collective bargaining issue.

7.1.3. A mechanism for resolving problems before they become disputes, which might damage the partnership, can be agreed upon and put in place for either party to trigger. These agreements and mechanisms will then be communicated to all local managers, union officials and representatives and Local Partnership Committees. This will ensure that as far as possible a protective ring fence is built around the partnership process in order to give it time to develop.

8. Partnership Actions

Partnership will really only begin to consolidate when actions begin to be taken. The new relationships will only develop when managers, employees and union representatives begin to engage in communication, information sharing, joint problem solving and reaching consensus decisions. Training without activity will not deliver partnership.



Once each Local Authority has selected its Local Partnership Committee, that committee has agreed upon and communicated their mission statement/Joint Objectives for partnership to all management and employees and undergone training they are ready to select their initial activity and develop an action plan.

They should view the first activity/area selected by each committee as a Pilot project for their area. In other words recognise that this is an opportunity to learn, that mistakes will be made and that real trust and Partnership will develop through the working out of these issues in a joint manner.

Guidelines for selection of these initial projects.

An issue/project which will realise some of the joint objectives.

An issue, which is visible and will be seen as beneficial to both management and employees.

An issue which can deliver an early success.

Evaluation and Communication.

As initial projects are acting as pilots, evaluation and learning is essential. The Local Partnership Committee should monitor and evaluate the project drawing out the important learning points and communicating these as widely as possible.

Did the Project achieve its objectives?

What helped the process?

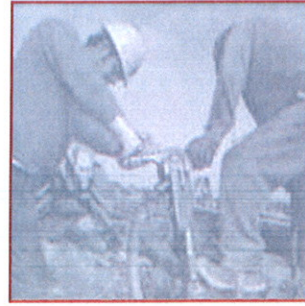
What hindered the process?

Was sufficient training provided?

Were sufficient resources provided?

What should be changed to ensure that the Partnership Objectives can be achieved?

The National Advisory Group should be kept informed of these issues and disseminate this information throughout the 34 Local Authorities.



Framework for Partnership

This document was agreed by the following parties on
25 February 1999

Signed:

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 Chris Spurgeon
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Matt Meany ^{SIPTU}
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