



Local Government Training Group

Supporting Local Government Reform

Governance, Accountability and Audit Arrangements

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Local Government Training Group in preparing its current programme and development initiatives for 2011/12 is conscious of the changing local government environment and the need to develop capacity building measures to support the outworkings of the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency Agenda across local government.

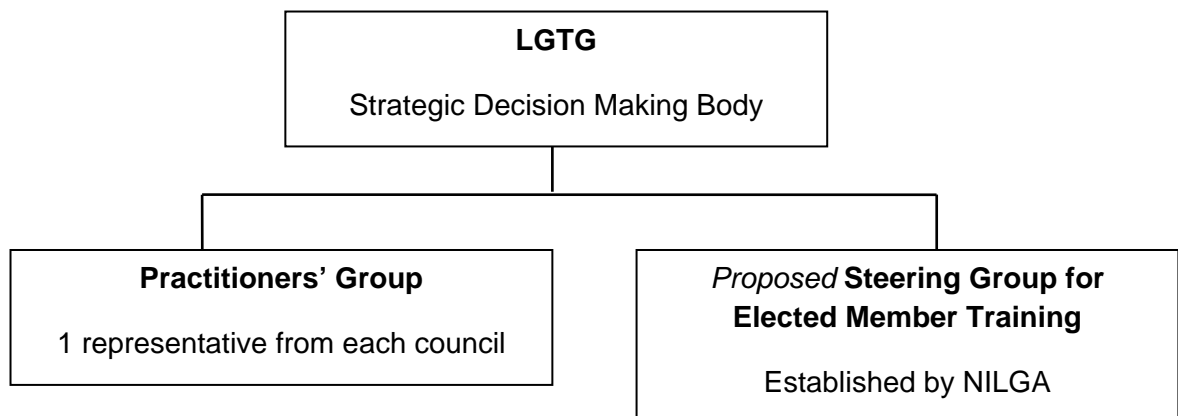
The Training Group are conscious of the continuing need to involve officers and elected members in the design and delivery of all Training Group development activities and has reconstituted to facilitate inclusive involvement by relevant stakeholder groupings (PPMA and NILGA).

This paper details the revised delivery mechanisms and contains in particular the resultant governance, accounting, audit and performance arrangements.

2.0 GOVERNANCE

2.1 Restructuring of LGTG Membership

In order to maximise its effectiveness and efficiency, the LGTG agreed to restructure its membership arrangements with effect from September 2010. A two-tier structure has been established, to reflect the strategic and operational aspects of the LGTG's work as follows:



2.2 LGTG as a Strategic Decision-Making Body

The LGTG remains as the higher level decision making body (i.e. the strategic development group) with responsibility for strategic initiatives and the budget. It has six members comprising two representatives from SOLACE (one of which is the Chair of LGTG); the Chief Executive of the LGSC; the Chairs of the two bodies representing officers (Practitioners' Group) and elected members (EM Steering Group) respectively; and a representative of Belfast City Council. The group will be responsible for policy and resourcing matters, with the Chief Executive of the LGSC continuing in his role as Accounting Officer.

The LGSC continues to provide the secretariat for both the LGTG and the Practitioners' Group in line with the service level agreement in place.

2.3 Officer Training

A Practitioners' Group is currently being established with the assistance of the Public Sector People Managers' Association (PPMA), consisting of a senior training and development officer or senior HR officer from each of the 26 councils. This Group will form sub-groups which will identify the capacity building needs of officers and recommend to the LGTG appropriate interventions within key training and development themes.

2.4 Elected Member Training

It would be advantageous to establish, through NILGA, a body similar to the former LGTG Steering Group for Elected Member Training to agree and ensure the implementation of a programme for elected member development.

It is suggested that it would be a matter for elected member representatives to decide whether membership of the new group should be based on nominations from NILGA alone or with the addition of the NAC or the Employers' Side of NIJC, which had been the practice with the Steering Group.

NILGA could provide administrative support for the new group.

2.5 Governance

It is important that proper governance arrangements are in place for the delivery of capacity building on a centralised basis. The current governance arrangements for the operation of the LGTG have been established and accepted by councils, the DOE and the Local Government Auditor and therefore provide a sound basis for future provision.

2.6 Accounting Officer

Day-to-day oversight of LGTG is exercised by the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) through its Chief Executive as Accounting Officer. In addition the LGTG is responsible to the LGSC for carrying out the Commission's statutory function of "*promoting or assisting the development of, or providing, facilities for the training of officers.*"¹

The minutes of LGTG meetings are included as a regular agenda item at LGSC meetings and the expenditure of the LGTG is under the scrutiny of the LGSC's Audit Committee. Since its re-constitution in December 2010 three Members of the LGSC are serving elected members.

3.0 **ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUDIT**

3.1 Operational Accountability

Since April 1993 the LGTG has been responsible to the LGSC for carrying out the Commission's statutory function of "promoting or assisting the development of, or providing, facilities for the training of officers." A Service Level Agreement (SLA) has existed between the LGTG and LGSC since April 2000, covering administrative, professional and financial matters and this SLA should be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The minutes of LGTG meetings will continue to be included as a regular agenda item at LGSC meetings.

3.2 Representational Accountability

Elected member involvement in the work of the LGTG will be through the work of the successor body to the Steering Group for Elected Member Training at practitioner level.

3.3 Partnering Arrangements

Both the LGTG and NILGA could operate as a joint secretariat to deal with capacity building initiatives which need to be addressed on a joint officer and elected member basis.

¹ Section 40 (4) (e) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972

As required, joint secretariat meetings would be held in advance of each scheduled meeting of the LGTG, to progress current programmes and recommended new initiatives prior to consideration by the LGTG.

To enable both secretariats to maintain a close working relationship, the NILGA secretariat would have observer status at meetings of the LGTG.

3.4 Scrutiny and Audit

Under the General Grant (Specified Bodies) Regulations (NI) 1994, the LGTG is specified for the purpose of having its expenditure defrayed by the DOE through deductions from the General Grant payable to councils. The DOE has appointed the Chief Executive of the LGSC as Accounting Officer and has placed the expenditure of the LGTG under the scrutiny of the LGSC's Audit Committee.

The LGTG's accounts will continue to be audited by the LGSC's Internal Auditors and the Local Government Auditor. The Annual Accounts will be published in the LGSC's Annual Report, in line with existing practice, having been made available, through press advertising, for public scrutiny and examination by interested parties on the appointed annual Audit Day.

4.0 **PERFORMANCE**

4.1 LGTG's Immediate Capacity Building Objective

The immediate objective of the LGTG will be to ensure the timely implementation of initiatives which will support the ICE programme and the Local Government Reform process.

4.2 LGTG Operational Priorities

The LGTG, primarily through the Practitioners' Group, will draw on the current extensive experience within local government and with other partners to enhance capacity building activities in the 26 councils through, for example:

- assisting in identifying training and development needs
- developing competency frameworks
- promoting leadership development
- promoting performance management and initiatives to build organisational capacity
- promoting management development programmes accredited by the University of Ulster and, for example, the Institute for Leadership and Management
- providing a menu of knowledge and skills based courses

- working with the successor body to the Steering Group for Elected Member Training, as required, to address elected members' needs identified by NILGA.
- sourcing experienced trainers to provide high quality courses and programmes to meet the ongoing needs of officers, elected members and organisations.
- carrying out evaluations of capacity building initiatives

4.3 Implementation

Since 1993 the Training Group has provided:

- An ongoing training programme relevant to the needs of local government (over 130 courses and programmes, 3000 training days, 1700 officers and members trained)
- Support to professional groups (e.g. Finance /IT officers) by arranging tailored courses and development materials
- Capacity development for elected members in relation to finance and governance arrangements.

The Practitioners' Group will utilise this previous experience to develop and recommend Capacity Building initiatives in support of the ICE programme. The Training Group envisage a similar role for the proposed Steering Group for Elected Member Training.

4.4 Evaluation

The effectiveness of the Training Group will be evaluated as follows:

1. The Local Government Staff Commission will be responsible for the overall effectiveness of the Training Group.
2. Ongoing course programme – the LGTG will carry out surveys amongst participants and their councils by written questionnaires and targeted telephone interviews to ensure that course content and delivery are of the highest possible standard and that desired outcomes have been achieved.