



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Improved Partnership Arrangements between the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and District Councils
Date:	3rd March, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Head of Environmental Health, ext 3281
Contact Officer:	Valerie Brown, Environmental Health Manager, ext 3301

Relevant Background Information

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) and the 26 district councils share responsibility for securing workplace health and safety standards in Northern Ireland. They apply similar legislation in different business sectors, with district councils being responsible for enforcement across the service, retail and entertainment sectors. It is imperative therefore that the respective work programmes of HSENI and district councils are complementary and that common goals and objectives are shared.

In June 2000, the Health and Safety Executive/Local Authority Liaison Committee for Northern Ireland (HELANI) was established as a HSENI Board Committee, and it has endeavoured over the years to provide strategic direction and focus for district councils in the production of realistic and targeted operational plans. In recent years however the partnership arrangements between HSENI and district councils have not been particularly effective, mainly due to changing circumstances and structures and it was considered that a review of the partnership should be carried out.

It was agreed that future collaborative working would be based on the principle of making the best use of respective strengths and applying collective resources in the most effective way to raise workplace health and safety standards across Northern Ireland and to improve the overall economic and social wellbeing of our community.

In a report to the Health and Environmental Services Committee in April 2009, a set of proposals for new partnership arrangements was outlined. These proposals included a statement of intent and an agreed joint strategic framework incorporating a set of guiding principles for the health and safety regulatory system in Northern Ireland. *Copies of both these documents have been attached.*

The statement of intent sets out 3 main commitments:

- Agree a joint strategic framework that identifies a set of guiding principles for the health and safety regulatory system in Northern Ireland;
- Work together to develop arrangements that will embed and deliver closer partnership working;
- Introduce a system that will facilitate effective joint planning and delivery at all levels between HSENI and district councils.

The Committee agreed that the Council should endorse the proposed working arrangements with HSENI and the statement of intent and strategic framework were signed by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council in May 2009.

Key Issues

The economic and social significance of improving workplace health and safety standards in terms of reducing the number of workplace accidents, reducing absenteeism and getting people back into work creates a compelling argument for HSENI and district councils to work together in developing cohesive and complementary planning arrangements and in applying collective resources in the most effective way to raise workplace health and safety standards across Northern Ireland.

However, to ensure progress in the implementation of these arrangements it is vital that a mechanism is put in place to actually bring about the achievement of the strategic framework's guiding principles and values. Ultimately the intention is to develop a single health and safety strategy for Northern Ireland come 2011.

Work has started on the development of a new single strategy which will set out a 'blueprint' for health and safety regulation in Northern Ireland. The operational plans of HSENI and the district councils will align with the goals that are set down within it. This will enable employers, employees, safety representatives and members of the public to have a clear understanding of the role of HSENI and district councils as health and safety regulators and the role that they themselves have in ensuring that Northern Ireland is a safe and healthy place to work.

Partnership working will lie at the heart of this overarching strategy as it is intended that the improved joint working arrangements will help to overcome a number of issues and challenges that currently exist within the regulatory system in Northern Ireland and will enable all health and safety regulators to work together more effectively in tackling both regional and local workplace health and safety priorities.

HSENI has already committed resource to developing the partnership by restructuring its Local Authority Unit to form a Partnership Team, comprising a Partnership Manager and a Partnership Officer, both at a senior level within the organisation. It is also prepared to invest in 50% of the cost of a Partnership Liaison Officer post on the basis of the 26 district councils providing the remaining 50%.

The main purpose of the Partnership Liaison Officer post will be to:

- Assist in the continuing development and implementation of the Strategic Framework for Partnership Working by building effective working relationships and processes;
- Co-ordinate the delivery of specific aspects of partnership arrangements such as joint planning, joint enforcement initiatives and campaigns, joint training and innovative ways of targeting resources more effectively;
- Monitor the output of these defined areas of joint work;
- Liaise with district councils and their representative bodies and partners on issues relating to workplace health and safety and provide a district council perspective on the Partnership Team;
- Support district councils in meeting their partnership commitments, particularly when developing business plans etc;
- Act as an effective communication channel between District Councils and HSENI;
- Ensure that district council interests are fed in to the joint planning processes.

The post holder will be based at HSENI, but for logistical reasons will be employed by a nominated 'employer' council, now agreed as Castlereagh Borough Council. The person will spend a significant proportion of time working with and within councils. A draft job description is attached. Line management for the PLO will reside with the Partnership Manager, who will complete any performance reports in conjunction with the employing council.

The post has not yet been evaluated but it is estimated that Belfast City Council's contribution, should it agree to invest in the post, will be approximately £1000 per year. In agreeing to contribute to the post, Belfast City Council will benefit in the following ways:

- Its work plans for its health and safety enforcement roles will have greater impact, as they will align to an over-arching strategy;
- Its officers will be able to share training resources with HSENI and other councils;
- Its enforcement and educational campaigns will be more cost effective as they will link in with province wide approaches;
- The Council will have greater access to specialist expertise;
- There is less duplication of effort across district councils and with HSENI;
- Resources will be better targeted to where impact can be maximised;
- The businesses within the area will have higher health and safety standards and will be better served by the regulators.

Resource Implications

The contribution to the PLO post being requested from Belfast City Council is £1,000 per annum and will be funded from the Revenue Estimates. A review will be carried out at the time that the Review of Public Administration is implemented.

The arrangement will enable resources such as training to be shared and information, additional expertise and specialist resources to be provided to the council by HSENI at no additional cost.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to support the new approach to collaborative working between HSENI and district councils by investing a maximum of £1000 per year in a Partnership Liaison Officer post to be based in the Partnership Team at HSENI.

Decision Tracking

The Head of Environmental Health will bring a report back to Committee within the first year of the post having been filled, detailing progress which is being made.
--

Key to Abbreviations

HSENI – Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland HELANI – Health and Safety Executive Local Authority Committee for Northern Ireland H&S Unit – Health and Safety Unit within the Environmental Health Service BIS - Business Improvement Section
--

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Statement of Intent. Appendix 2 - The Northern Ireland Health and Safety Regulatory System – A Strategic Framework for Partnership Working. Appendix 3 - Partnership Liaison Officer draft Job Description.
--