

Annual report for N. Ireland 2007

Council meeting

6 December 2007

Report from Gary McFarlane, Director NI

1.0 Summary and recommendations

- 1.1 This report summarises the key activities of the CIEH NI Directorate in 2007.
- 1.2 It also provides an overview of key challenges and activities for 2008.
- 1.3 Council are recommended to note the report.

2.0 Membership profile

- 2.1 At the end of 2006 there are 585 members in NI with the breakdown in membership types as follows: 7 Fifty year; 9 fellows; 364 voting; 31 graduate; 25 associate; 134 student.
- 2.2 The majority of non retired members work within the local authority EH Service in NI. However, several of our members work outside this service including, notably, within government and also in some cases for other public bodies and agencies.

3.0 Environmental Health in NI

- 3.1 There are currently 26 local authorities in NI. The ongoing Review of Public Administration is likely to change this however. Since the restoration of devolution in 2007, responsibility for this review has been handed over to the NI Executive. They in turn are now reconsidering the future roles, functions and indeed structure of local authorities in NI, along with other key elements of the public sector. It is not yet clear what the outcomes of this will be. Suffice to say that it will not be based on the recommendations brought forward by the previous administration during 2006.
- 3.2 Within the majority of the existing local authorities the EH Service sits within a wider directorate. Of the current 26 authorities, 11 of them have an EHP appointed

at strategic director level. In some other cases (5) the EH Service still exists as a directorate in its own right.

- 3.3 In addition, whilst not part of the local Authority Service, NI still retains a Chief EHO post within the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Given the very different public health structures in NI there are, as yet, no EHPs employed within the public health service itself. However, this may change as an outcome of RPA. CIEH continues to advocate for a strategic environmental health unit within government.
- 3.4 The CIEH accredited undergraduate programme at the University of Ulster continues to prosper. Some of the recent difficulties with student placements are beginning to be resolved. The calibre of applicants to the undergraduate programme continues to be of an extremely high standard. The UUJ undergraduate programme is, unusually within the United Kingdom, oversubscribed in terms of applications. Despite improvements in placement opportunities outside the local authority sector along with some progress in the way in which local authority places are allocated, UUJ students still experience difficulties. In brief there are not enough local authority places available in NI to meet demand. Paradoxically UUJ students have some difficulties accessing potential placements in England where they exist. It should be noted that currently 100% of NI Councils offer student placements. No financial support is available for this, unlike the situation in England.
- 3.5 In summary whilst there is a national shortage of qualified EHPs UUJ continue to turn down high calibre applicants for the undergraduate programme primarily because NI cannot meet the demand itself for ELP opportunities within the local government sector. This remains, in my view, an issue which more could and should be done to address through the local government associations, and in particular LGA.

4.0 The CIEH NI Directorate

- 4.1 2007 has seen continuing growth in the activities and influence of CIEH in NI. The following sections provide some highlights from 2007. Activities and aims can be summarised under 3 core headings namely: influencing policy; increasing profile; and membership services. The first two of these are often interrelated and as such will be taken together for the purposes of this report.

4.2 Influencing Policy and increased profile

- 4.2.1 The Review of Public Administration (RPA) is arguably the most wide-ranging review of public services in the history of Northern Ireland. The process began in 2002 and the CIEH has been involved from the start in providing policy advice, advocacy, and influence. As outlined at 3.12 and 3.3 above, CIEH continues to provide input to this process. In early November 2007 the Director met with the Minister for the Environment whose department carries the responsibility for local government reforms as part of the RPA. Following on from that meeting and at the request of the Minister we have provided a further paper to the NI Executive Sub Group set up to advise the RPA process. The Director is due to meet with the

Minister for Health in January 2008 to further discuss the points raised in this latest submission.

- 4.2.2 In 2007 CIEH has, in partnership with others, developed and launched further coalitions on key policy areas of critical importance to public and environmental health. In October 2007 the Coalition for Climate Change was launched at Stormont with around 13 MLAs, including the President of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, pledging their support. As a founding member of the coalition this again places CIEH at the heart of this critical issue.
- 4.2.3 Following the launch of a sustainable development strategy for NI in 2006 in which CIEH played a central role, we have continued to work closely with other NGOs and the government in this policy area. In 2007 the Director was appointed to the Board of Sustainable Northern Ireland which will be a key vehicle for implementation of sustainable development.
- 4.2.4 During 2007 CIEH provided training for local authorities in the lead up to the implementation of the smokefree legislation in April 2007. This training was funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). The significance of this is in the implicit acknowledgement of CIEH as a legitimate, high quality training provider and the precedent that it sets. This is the first time that DHSSPS has used CIEH as a direct training provider and this creates clear opportunities for the future. DHSSPS also made funding available to local authorities in NI to appoint additional staff to assist with the implementation of the smokefree intervention.
- 4.2.5 2007 has seen the completion of all fieldwork for a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the smokefree legislation on indoor air quality. The analysis of the data is underway at the time of writing and it is anticipated that the research paper/report will be completed early 2008. CIEH are working with the Ulster Cancer Foundation (UCF) and Assembly Ministers to create an appropriate high profile launch event for this research.
- 4.2.6 CIEH is and remains a core founding member of the Public Health Alliance for the island of Ireland (PHA). In November 2007 the findings of a 2 year research project on food poverty in NI were launched. CIEH is one of the three partner organisations and a copy of the final report is available for all Trustees. The report carries several recommendations one of which is directly relevant to environmental health services within local authorities, namely the need to place a much more significant emphasis on food standards related work. This clearly has implications for not only local authorities but also the Food Standards Agency. The Director has already been asked to present and discuss these findings to the FSA NI Advisory Board (5th December). In addition, the First and Deputy First Ministers for NI have asked for a meeting with the Director to discuss this report and its implications. This work has provided an analysis of what is a core public health issue and through our association with it will assist in further adding to CIEH's position, integrity and profile.
- 4.2.7 CIEH continues to be increasingly invited to give views and make presentations at key events in NI, particularly within the public health and

sustainable development arenas. This would indicate that we are now recognised as an organisation with some authority and expertise in these areas. During 2007 the Director has given several presentations on the linkages between health and environment at both national and international conferences.

4.3 Membership Services

- 4.3.1 Following on from the successes in 2005 and 2006, the NI Directorate once again provided a low cost education and continuing professional development programme for members in 2007. This is a direct response to a number of drivers including consultation with members in NI in 2004 as well as a result of research carried out by the communication and membership directorate in 2005. The feedback from this programme and the specific events included within it continues to be extremely positive.
- 4.3.2 Through dialogue with the Chief Environmental Health Officers Group CIEH has developed outline proposals regarding training and capacity building for EHPs in 2008 and beyond. This links back to our EH2012 Vision and the skills gaps identified therein as well as the recognition of our need to improve our evidence base. It will also assist in preparing the EH workforce as NI moves towards the implementation of RPA.
- 4.3.3 The CIEH NI Directorate now provides secretariat services to the NI Regional Management Board following discussions during 2007. This includes the provision of meeting space. We are also making our meeting space available to any members in NI should they require such a facility. During 2007 we provided accommodation for the Project Manager for the Smokefree Environments Team. We have also developed a small library facility for the use of members.
- 4.3.4 During 2007 we have successfully afforded an undergraduate from the UUU environmental health programme with a work based learning opportunity based around specific project work. It is hoped to continue and possibly expand this during 2008.

4 Challenges for 2008

- 4.1 Work programme for 2008 is currently being finalised. The first strategic plan for NI was written in 2004 and ran until the end of 2007. During 2008 it is proposed to revisit the strategic drivers that were determined for the region back in 2004 through a comprehensive membership engagement process to amend and update these where and if appropriate.
- 4.2 Review of Public Administration will continue to be a key policy area for CIEH in 2008. Since the restoration of devolution in 2007 this process and the outcomes have continued to evolve given that the process has now been given over to the new NI Executive. In fact CIEH has, only in the last few weeks as outlined at 4.2.1, been actively involved in this process. We will continue to advocate for a future system of public administration in Northern Ireland that will contribute to a better quality of life for its people.

- 4.3 We must continue to build relationships with the new NI assembly and in particular its ministers.
- 4.4 We will continue to deliver the low cost, high quality training programme as always seeking to build upon and improve earlier successes. This will also include at least 2 high level conferences in 2008 as well as incorporation of the new CIEH low cost training initiative developed through the Education and Professional Standards Directorate.
- 4.5 Capacity will continue to be an issue within the NI Directorate, as it has increasingly been in 2007. Whilst the Director now has the support of a personal assistant as well as some additional part time assistance. The latter is not permanent and has been made possible through external funding related to project work. The current level of activity is unsustainable without additional support.
- 4.6 I believe that in the longer term there is a need for Council to consider the central support and resources available to the NI Directorate if they wish to continue to develop and increase our positioning and profile within this region with the clear benefits that this brings not only to the organisation but also in terms of our ability to influence elsewhere, including significantly for the future the ROI.

5 Implications

Environmental	Continued contribution to CIEH mission and vision
Equal opportunities	None
Financial	Within budget
Legal	None
Personnel	None
Public health	Continued contribution to CIEH mission and vision
Public relations	Several opportunities

Background papers Available from Gary McFarlane, Director NI
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