

7.2 Dublin City Council

Organisational Profile

Although Dublin City Council (DCC) has been in existence, in one form or another, for over five hundred years, it only began to officially employ people in 1850. Today, DCC employs 6,500 staff in 500 locations around the city. Its primary activities are the provision of housing, water, waste management and other services to the city's population, the collection of local taxes such as business rates and car tax, and community-building activities in areas of the city suffering from high rates of unemployment, drug addiction and social exclusion. In 2002, DCC's budget was over €1 billion. In the words of a senior manager, Dublin City Council is 'the conduit through which the city operates'.

Employee Relations

Dublin City Council is almost fully unionised – 94% of its workforce has union membership (see Table 7.2-1). DCC has enjoyed industrial peace for a number of years and both management and unions reported increased levels of trust and positive working relationships between individual managers and trade union officials. This is due primarily to the introduction of formal information and consultation processes such as the Dublin City Council Partnership Forum.

The operating environment within which Dublin City Council finds itself has changed fundamentally in recent years. Competitiveness and productivity have become important performance indicators

due to reduced resources and political drift towards the privatisation of council-provided services such as water and waste management. If DCC management, staff and unions wish to continue to provide these services directly, they have to prove their ability to compete effectively against private sector providers. Consequently, flexibility and cost consciousness have been key change drivers in recent years.

For example, the threat of privatisation in waste collection services galvanised a joint management-union approach to change. Waste collection was transformed to a flexible, twenty four/seven style service, incorporating recycling imitative, and managed by smaller, more productive crews.

Information Sharing

Dublin City Council uses indirect and direct methods to inform and consult with its workforce and their representatives. **Indirect information** processes include issuing circulars to trade union representatives, holding meetings, telephone calls and making presentations to the Partnership Forum. Despite some union misgivings, DCC managers also use **direct information** processes, in the belief that staff 'like to hear it from the City Manager, from the horse's mouth, so to speak'. Processes include newsletters, direct briefings, intranet postings, an organisational handbook, memos, notice boards, email and notices contained in wage slips.

Table 7.2-1 Dublin City Council staff & union structure

Grade	No. Employed	% Employed	Represented by
Fire Brigade	1,000	15	SIPTU (Industrial)
Craft Workers	800	12	TEEU, Craft Unions
General Operatives	3,000	46	SIPTU (Local Authority)
Admin, Technical & Professional Staff	1,700	26	Impact (Local Government)

Consultation

Indirect consultation – takes place through the Partnership Forum, established in 1999, and other joint management-union committees concerned with staff issues, such as Equality, Health and Safety and Work-Life Balance. The Partnership Forum has 24 members – 12 trade union representatives, 6 management representatives and 6 staff representatives – and meets monthly. Issues under discussion can include the development of partnership approaches in DCC, HR issues including absenteeism, key organisational and business issues, productivity and performance issues. It is serviced and facilitated by two staff from DCC's Human Resources Division.

When the Forum was established, it tried to decentralise partnership and established locally based groups that worked in partnership to solve problems at local level. Not all of these groups were successful and some have since dissolved. However, groups still operate in the Fire Brigade and in the Stanley St. Mechanical Division (see Example 7.2-a, opposite).

The Forum is currently undergoing significant change. Management and unions have agreed to deepen the existing agenda to include issues normally confined to Industrial Relations processes (in particular, issues relating to terms and conditions of employment). Consequently, the parties are restructuring the Forum to facilitate this change, and the staff representatives will no longer sit on the Forum. Their positions are being given to management representatives.

There are mixed views on the efficiency of formal consultation processes. There is a consensus between managers and trade unions that the quality of information and consultation can depend on an individual managers attitude, ability and

management style, which varies widely across DCC's 500 sites. Many middle managers do not communicate effectively with staff, Head Office or trade unions. Management and union representatives agree that they have 'not bought into partnership'.

In addition, there is a history of exclusion (whether deliberate or not) of General Operatives (G.O.s) and other outdoor staff from the information and consultation loop. For example, many G.O.s don't have access to information technology because, traditionally, they were barred from entering administration areas, and although that is no longer the case, the separation mentality lingers.

In addition, there are mixed views on the effectiveness of existing consultation processes. Trade union representatives feel that consultation generally takes place 'post-decision and pre-implementation' and that management are engaging in 'a rubber-stamping exercise'. Managers accepted that the consultation 'experience' varied widely throughout DCC, but felt that the Partnership Forum has contributed greatly to the maintenance of industrial peace and the development of a partnership approach to change at central level.

The benefits of Information and Consultation

There is a strong level of consensus on the benefits of information, consultation and partnership processes in DCC. Management and trade unions agreed that formal Information and Consultation processes have improved organisational performance in the following areas: introducing changes to work practices, increasing workforce flexibility and attitudes to change, introducing new services and increasing the level of joint problem solving. The parties agree that staff commitment is increasing.

Example 7.2-a Partnership in Dublin City Council's Mechanical Division

The Mechanical Division Services undertakes fleet maintenance for DCC, including NCT, fuel purchasing, accident reporting, driver training (800 drivers) and maintenance of the Lord Mayor's Coach. The division operates in a number of sites, including Stanley St. Trade union representation is primarily by craft unions. There has been a turbulent IR history and low trust.

In 1999, a new Senior Engineer, with experience of working in the private sector, took over the running of the Division. Around the same time, a staff member with extensive trade union experience was promoted to Superintendent. Both were concerned about issues threatening the future of the division, including:

- Changing environment – increased levels of contracting on the part of DCC meant the division's workbase was reducing and jobs were threatened
- DCC had reduced its fleet and the division's staff had dropped from 143 to 50
- The division was not seen as producing value for money.

Around the same time, union representatives began to realise that the remaining jobs were going to be lost if they didn't do something. The management team introduced an open door policy, with 'a door that opened both ways' and went out onto the shop floor to talk to people. They also began to hold supervisor's team meetings, before the concept of Team Talk was introduced.

In an attempt to develop an understanding of the bigger picture, the management team held in-house training for all staff to increase awareness of the organisation and to increase commitment to the division and to each other. Workshop fitters and administration staff were encouraged to mix and to learn about their interdependence.

A crucial breakthrough came when the fitters agreed to broaden their skillbase and multi-task in return for a 7.5% pay increase. Unions asked for and received business information and realised the division could reduce costs and become more competitive than private contractors. A comparative study was undertaken: half the fleet was maintained in-house and half sent out to a private maintenance company. The results were compared – due to the changes adopted by the fitters and other staff, the Mechanical Division proved itself more competitive than the private contractor.

A Mechanical Division Partnership Forum was established with nine members – three management, three union and three staff representatives. Administration staff and fitters have an equal say. Managers guarantee the presence of a decision-maker at each meeting, under a system they call management substitution. Decision-making is consensus-based and issues dealt with to date include the:

- Introduction of an electronic job card
- Outcomes of a comparative study of the costs of using contractors/ in house team
- Development of a retirement ritual/ party that gave dignity to people
- Development of a fleet management system and code book – 70% of staff have ECDL
- Building of a first aid room and the development and circulation of a safety handbook and instructions manuals for all machinery
- Changes in how parts are ordered through stores.