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## **Programme Area 25 – Capacity-building and Institutional Cooperation between Beneficiary State and Norwegian Public Institutions, Local and Regional Authorities**

### **Project MT04/1 - ‘A Partnership for Creative Governance’**

**Project Promoter:** Department for Local Government, Malta (DLG)

**Project Partners:** Local Councils Association, Malta  
Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, Council of Europe  
Norwegian Association of Local Municipalities (KS)

**Project Leader:** Joseph Azzopardi, DLG

### **Introduction**

The evolving global scenario is presenting various challenges to governance at regional & local level. Globalisation, global economic turmoil, proliferation in the use of ICT & environmental dynamics are some of the main drivers to which local governance has to respond. Austerity policies throughout Europe necessitate that politicians & executives at local council level do more with less. Creative thinking & innovation play a crucial part if sustainable communities are to be developed. The development of effective, democratic local government is a fundamental change from the old ways of governing. Local authorities need the capacity to attract committed elected representatives and a set up of competent staff. By training them to deliver good local public services they will become organisations that foster sound leadership and management, engage local people and meet high standards of public service to better serve the community. Effective local government calls for a pertinent and well planned strategy that requires local initiative and increased and strengthened cooperation in the respective European public institutions and in regional and local government.

In this regard, ‘A Partnership for Creative Governance’ has succeeded in conducting a comprehensive training needs analysis leading to a National Training Strategy as a key factor for change in the economic and social situation in local communities. A study in 2008 by the Council of Europe’s Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform showed that local government in Malta remained centralised and that little changed since its inception in 1993. Training programmes for local council staff and elected representatives, indispensable in fostering the international experience of foreign local government systems, were not available. Newly elected representatives received little training for their important role. Most of the 68 Maltese local councils are short of budget and professional capacity with fewer than five councils having a training budget.

The project was launched on the 20th of February 2014 where the objectives of the project were explained to the participating local authorities. Subsequently, the Department for Local Government (DLG) set up a training unit and several training initiatives to bring about the needed change. DLG embarked on the identification of gaps in the system by launching a skills’ profiling exercise on individual and local council requirements. This was the first step towards confirming the need for a full training requirements assessment to establish all the possible gaps in the local government system. The second step consisted of an assessment of the actual performance of local authorities against existing standards.

‘A Partnership for Creative Governance’ was the first serious attempt to bring about the much needed culture change in the Maltese local government scenario. Through a stronger local government system the long-term benefits for the Maltese community shall include an improved standard of living, a change in mentality, and a local government system that operates more closely to that expected at a European level. This should ameliorate Malta’s position in the Human Development Index, which currently stands slightly above the EEA average, particularly with regard to an improved standard of living. The project actions are designed to meet the present shortcomings of the system and to overcome challenges. They are being delivered with the additional comfort of expertise through Donor project partnership and the Council of Europe. The National Training Strategy that was developed also made provisions for an academic course that received funding under an ESF project.



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### ***Project Actions:***

#### **National Training Strategy**

The National Training Strategy, in a policy paper format, was compiled following an intensive consultation process with stakeholders, including the printing thereof & dissemination of the strategy. Based on the research & conclusions conducted with the Training Needs Assessment for Local Government, the National Training Strategy for Local Councils in Malta identified six strategic goals: improving the regulatory framework for local government; increasing stakeholders' potential with the aim to ensure sustainable development of local government in Malta; raising Key stakeholders' awareness of contemporary model of local government operation across Europe; enhancing the competence of local councilors in the sphere of local government responsibilities, key legal regulations concerning its operations and the role of local councils; creating a sustainable institutional training framework for local government and increasing the quality of performance of local government staff. Twenty specific objectives were proposed for the implementation of the six strategic goals, ranging for the setting up of a National Training Commission, a National Training Institution and the implementation of proactive measures that can be taken to ameliorate the quality of services provided from local councils to the public. This can be achieved with a proper training structure to all key stakeholders involved, be it a politician or a public officer at national or local level. The strategy gives also further direction by means of proposed actions to ensure a smooth operation and sustainability of the six strategic goals. The National Training Strategy is currently being analysed by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Local Government for implementation on a national basis by the Maltese Government.

#### **Performance Management Programme**

Another milestone of the project, the Performance Management Programme was implemented during 2015. Despite the Maltese legal framework for local government established a performance management system, it was always difficult to implement due to lack of expertise in the local government system. The project, aided by a Council of Europe expert, studied an efficient system that can be implemented according to European standards. This was achieved by the setting up of a Pilot Project, in which nineteen local councils participated and assisted by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, KS. Three sessions of comprehensive analysis and training were held in Malta for the Pilot Project together with further expertise and a sharing of knowledge experience in Norway during May 2015. The Maltese participants had the possibility of meeting a comprehensive number of Norwegian experts in performance management, together with a day the Municipality of Lunner where the participants had the opportunity to share best practices that have managed to make a turnaround strategy for this municipality, in terms of performance. The Pilot Project has concluded that a performance management system can be developed in Malta and has focused on three main areas of development: road maintenance, locality cleanliness and the services provided at the administrative offices. Key performance indicators were proposed and established, including the publication of a performance management and risk management manual, the latter deemed necessary to evaluate the risk management issues and the lack of a proper framework. The performance management guide shows the key aspects of performance management and gives a strategic direction towards a proposed set of nationally adopted measures that should be implemented to support effective improvement in the performance of public services.



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### **Leadership Academy**

2015 saw the establishment of the Leadership Academy Programme. The Leadership Academy was a learning and action programme for executive secretaries and elected representatives (including mayors) of local government. Its implementation is aiding these highest officials in local government in Malta to develop their capacities to strengthen the institutional capacities of their municipality and develop good local governance. The programme was divided into 3 by 3 day stages namely the challenge of good governance, personal and institutional capacity and institutional and community leadership. Between the stages, participants carried out leadership assignments within their own municipalities and report back on them in the subsequent stages. Participants were introduced to new thinking about good governance at local level in a very inter-active way. A range of training techniques examined the challenges faced by local councils and taught how good leadership can tackle them. Strengthening of institutional capacities and working effectively with local people and organisations; considering how civil society can contribute to good governance, developing personal awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for good leadership were examined in detail. All 3 stages of the Academy have been concluded, the last one was held between 20th and 23rd June 2016. Successful participants were presented with certificates as inspiration leaders in Maltese local government.

### **European Label of Local Governance (EloGE)**

The European Label of Governance Excellence (EloGE) is awarded to local authorities having achieved a high overall level of governance, by a national or regional stakeholders platform. This platform needs to be accredited by the stakeholders' platform of the Council of Europe. Local authorities are evaluated according to a matrix evaluating their action, and a questionnaire addressed to citizens and a questionnaire addressed to local elected representatives. The evaluation allows to local authorities to understand their strengths and their weaknesses when providing public services to the local community and exercising public authority. Local authorities can use the various tools developed by the Centre of expertise and inspire themselves from their colleagues' best practices. An information session for the participating local authorities was organised on the 24th of June 2016. During this session Council of Europe representatives briefed executive secretaries and elected representatives about the requirements. Subsequently the National Stakeholders Platform with representatives from the Ministry of Justice Culture and Local Government, Parliamentary Secretariat for Local Government, Association of Local Authorities, National Association of Executive Secretaries, Department for Local Government, University of Malta and the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, was set up. Participating local authorities were guided throughout the following months so that they present the matrix and questionnaires to the National Stakeholders Platform. After the 15 participating local councils forwarded their findings, these were analysed by the National Stakeholders' Platform, which in turn decided to engage an independent expert to draw a report on the information provided. The report presented by the expert was approved by the Platform. The unanimous Platform's decision was that none of the 15 local authorities had got the grade to be awarded the Label. The Platform however decided to present all 15 local authorities a certificate of participation in the EloGe process during a presentation ceremony on Friday the 25th November 2016, as a sign of appreciation for their efforts. It was also decided that further training and mentoring was to be provided to those interested local authorities during 2017 in order to better prepare them for the required standards expected for the award of the Label.