

AGREEMENT ON THE 'QUALITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT' PROGRAMME

This is an agreement between the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the major labour unions, the Federation of Norwegian Professional Associations (Akademikerne), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS) and the Confederation of Unions for Professionals, Norway (Unio) This agreement is effective until the end of 2009. The parties may terminate the agreement on three months notice.

The aim of this agreement is to establish a high-level partnership between the government, the municipal sector and the labour organisations with the aim of improving the quality of local government services. Initially, this is in general care for elderly and disabled people, and nursing and education for children and young people.

Background

The local government sector has comprehensively restructured during recent years, mainly due to scarce resources and strong pressure on services. This has been a demanding process for local politicians as well as local government personnel. The government has launched efforts to improve the financial situation of local government. This does not mean that improvements and efficiencies are less important, but it gives local politicians and local government personnel more options to improve the quality of services. The overall goal is to improve services for local residents and the main challenge is to fully involve elected representatives and local government employees in this task. A further challenge is to address the increased absences from work due to illness in the municipal sector.

The vision of the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development is that the municipality should be an actively-democratic arena where people want to participate. The aim is for municipalities to provide high quality services, dynamic community developers facilitating collaboration between public agencies and voluntary organizations, should provide and be a good workplace for their employees. All municipal sector activities should be characterized by high ethical standards

Nature of Agreement

The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, in consultation with the Minister of Health and Care Services and the Minister of Education and Research, establishes a collaboration between the government, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the labour organisations in the municipal sector - the Federation of Norwegian Professional Associations (Akademikerne), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS) and the Confederation of Unions for Professionals, Norway (Unio) aims to improve quality in local government, initially in general care for elderly and disabled people, nursing and education for children and young people (day care and schools). The programme creates procedures and processes for continued improvements and efficiencies in the municipal sector, and will eventually be expanded to include other types of services.

This quality in local government agreement builds upon initiatives already being taken to improve the quality of local government services. These specifically include existing agreements on improving nursing, general care and schools, as well as an agreement between the government and KS on improving day care.

Engaging employees in the process of making improvements to the work environment and reduces absences from work due to illness. The negative trend in sick leave requires specific attention in both the near and long term, assisted by an effective collaboration between elected representative and local government employees. An initial priority was to provide direct guidance to individual municipalities on measures to reduce sick leave.

The aim of the partnership is to increase the quality and efficiency of local government services through effective collaboration between elected representative and local government employees, leading to improvements that are evident to local residents. Reducing absenteeism among local government employees is a specific goal.

The driving idea behind the quality in local government partnership is that gains in the quality and efficiency of services can be achieved through local partnerships between elected representatives and local government employees. Local collaboration must involve employees who work directly with the public, have strong support from local elected representatives and build on good work already under way or completed. Quality in local government initiatives will strengthen and extend existing efforts. This main agreement was the starting point for the partnership.

The central partnership programme develops and supports local work in many municipalities, providing professional and technical guidance based on recent experience of improvements information communication and participatory dialogue. Financial support may also be provided to a limited extent.

Locally the project should have duration of 2 to 3 years. The actual work in each individual municipality will depend on local issues and challenges. Each municipality will set its own priorities within the overall programme framework. Emphasis will be placed on collaboration across a variety of technical and professional areas and also on mobilizing resources from outside local government.

Municipalities are selected for inclusion in the programme based on applications which clearly identify the focus areas and work plans. The participating municipalities are required to establish targets for their own improvement work and there is a strong emphasis on achieving these objectives.

The documentation and local evaluation of projects are included in the programme.

Organisation

Central:

Political contact meeting

Political leaders of the participating ministries, management of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, management of the participating labour organisations.
Chaired by the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.
Meets about twice a year to discuss policy for collaboration and relevant issues.

Steering committee

The steering committee is responsible for the professional and technical content of the programme, the selection of participating municipalities and overseeing of the programme implementation. The steering committee is chaired by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and is made up of representatives at administrative level from the participating ministries, labour organisations and KS

Secretariat

KS is responsible for the secretariat, which has central operational responsibility for the programme, working closely with the steering committee.

Local:

The participating municipalities themselves choose how the work is set up and organised, but must ensure representation from elected representatives, management and the employees' organisations in managing the work. The work must be endorsed locally by all labour organisations.

Finance:

The main financial resources, up to NOK 20 million for 2007, came from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development on behalf of the government. The other ministries, KS and the labour organisations contributed expertise and personnel resources to the programme, and possibly partial financing.

Provisional budget:

Secretariat (central and local advisers)	NOK 7 million
Competence development	NOK 3 Million
Stimulation funding	NOK 10 million

Also potential part financing from the other collaboration partners.

Åslaug Haga

Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development

Rigmor Aasrud

Ministry of Health and Care Services

Per Botolph Maurseth

Ministry of Education and Research

Olav Ulleren

KS

Ole Jakob Knudsen

Akademikerne

Jan Davidsen

LO

Helga Hjetland
Unio

Gunn Olander
YS