

RPA Chairpersons Forum: 17 September 2008
Antrim Area Board Centre

Present: Education Minister Caitríona Ruane MLA
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)
Reverend Robert Herron (WELB)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
Maria Young (YCNI)
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Marie Donnell (SELB)
Alistair Orr (GTCNI)
David McKee (CCEA)
Joan Christie (SEELB)

Will Haire (DE)
John McGrath (DE)
David Woods (DE)
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

Apologies: Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)
Douglas Osler (SEELB)

In attendance: Fearghal O'Reilly (DE)

The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. The Minister gave an update on the political situation and stressed that the ESA was going to happen. The date for the implementation may slip slightly but given the size of the task, any slippage would be minor. The key consideration should be to ensure that services to pupils are maintained.

Gavin Boyd gave a presentation on the ongoing work of redesigning the range of different services (c 40) which would become the responsibility of ESA. The aim is to have services which are managed centrally at regional level – to ensure consistency of provision – but with delivery at local level, to ensure responsiveness to local needs. Gavin gave examples in relation to two services. It is to be expected that the restructuring would impact mainly at middle and top management level rather than on those at the front line.

In discussion on the impact of the transitional period on the existing organisations, Chairpersons raised a number of issues, including:

- Concern at the rising number of temporary (Agency) workers being appointed to positions in organisations. The figures are rising and are expected to rise further.
- Middle management positions were going unfilled as no one is prepared to take a position if it may be terminated in April 2009.
- Vacancy control needs to be examined if there is a delay to the target date of 1 April.
- The location of ESA needs to be clarified.

The Minister noted the points raised and agreed that there is a need to examine the vacancy control issues in particular.

David Woods gave a presentation outlining the revised business planning arrangements envisaged within DE and to parallel the arrangements intended for ESA.

[The Minister left at 16.55.]

John McGrath gave an update on the bidding process for the September monitoring round. Looking ahead, Will Haire and John explained that the outlook for forthcoming years' budgets was very tight, which would make it all the more important to realise the savings expected from the RPA changes.

The meeting closed at 17.15.

The location and date for the next meeting will be notified to members as soon as possible.