

Strategic Advisory Group

Minutes of 4th Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group

The Island Civic Centre, Lisburn

Present:

Chairperson
Members

DEL Observer
Secretariat

Apologies

Chairman's Introduction

1. The Chairperson welcomed all members to the 4th meeting and in particular welcomed and who were substituting for others.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2. Members referred to the previous minutes, which contained an amendment to the minutes of the 2nd meeting, and expressed some concern that the "Specialist Schools" amendments suggested a greater degree of clarity on the issues than was reached during the discussions. Members agreed that the minute should record that various management models had been discussed but many issues needed further consideration and that for "*any development of "specialisms" should be an integral part of the overall implementation of Costello recommendation*" substitute "*any development of "specialisms" should be consistent with the overall implementation of the Costello recommendations*".

3. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed subject to the aforementioned amendment.

Area and Local Partnerships

4. The Chairperson indicated that the issue of area and local partnership was about support processes for the implementation of the new arrangements and asked members to be mindful of the following when considering how best to proceed:-

- The local and area arrangements should build on existing structures and encourage collaborative working among schools and between schools and FE Colleges;
- Any proposals must not be overly bureaucratic; must add value and must be cost effective.

5. outlined the background to the Costello recommendation for the establishment of local and area partnerships and the concerns raised in relation to these recommendations, which included increased bureaucracy, impact on existing management and ownership responsibilities of school managing authorities and the cost of implementing new structures.

6. Members discussed the Costello recommendations and accepted the need for a “bottom up and top down” approach. They recognised that the Department should articulate a clear strategic direction and following a comprehensive discussion the overall view was:

- A sub-group of SAG should draw up a high level “template” to guide managing authorities in relation to future development of school structures. This should involve the Department’s Development and Infrastructure Division.
- There was little support for APDPs as recommended by Costello, however, there is a need for clear guidance to schools setting out the parameters within which local collaboration should be developed, including the contribution of the FE sector, to meet the Entitlement Framework.
- Local groupings of schools should be established on a voluntary basis using existing collaborative arrangements, where appropriate.
- Local groupings would require some external support.

(Notes from the discussions are contained in Annex A.)

Future Work Programme

7. It was agreed that the Department would canvas members on availability for meetings for the period from January – June 2005.

8. The meeting closed at 4:30pm. The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions.

Chairperson _____ Date _____

Costello Model

Q1 - Will the Costello LPDP/APDP model meet the objectives?

Q2 - What should be the extent of APDP responsibilities for coordinating planning and provision of services?

Q3 - What role should an APDP have where an LPDP and a school managing authority disagree about an individual schools role in a locality?

Comments

Strategic Framework

- Need for strategic framework - this can be developed as the process moves forward.
- Local areas will make all the soft decisions and the hard decisions will have to be made at a higher level. Management should manage.
- Need some mechanism to ensure all schools are taking account of the Strategic Framework.
- Very local groups working together with high-level group overseeing that all schools fulfil their remit to provide the Entitlement Framework.
- Strategic overview with local input.
- Faced with situation that we may need interim Strategic arrangements.
- Need Costello Proofing criteria for development proposals. Should be in the Strategic overview.
- DE needs strategic forum to look at the schools estate
- Demography is biting now – some strategic planning is needed sooner rather than later.
- Need to build model to manage Strategic change – high level forum that informs local work.
- The Strategic Framework should be informed by information about schools, pupil numbers, demographic trends etc that DE should make available to all local groups.

Issues within the Strategic Framework

Strategic Direction

- Difficult to move forward in a vacuum – may lead to false hope.
- Management authorities must be involved.
- System must put pupils first
- Demography impacting differently in different areas.
- Timing is an issue – move more quickly on the curricular aspects.

Entitlement Framework

- Will local level address issues relating to new schools and 6th forms? – Look at local provision and decide how best to deliver the Entitlement Framework. Managing authorities remain responsible for development proposals.
- Partnerships must help schools to deliver the Entitlement Framework

Schools Infrastructure

- Need to look long term at the buildings and decide if they are in the right place and in good shape to provide for the pupils.
- Continued existence of schools that are not viable will restrict the development.
- Some schools with questionable viability may be in the right location under the new arrangements.
- Need to look at viability – will school be in existence and deliver the Entitlement Framework in 2008?
- At a strategic level - need to define viability – for schools, 6th forms
- Legislation may be needed if the area partnership is to become involved in the development proposal procedure.
- Some local considerations will require no change, some will require development proposals and some will require closures. Most will need managing authority input.
- New areas of new build should be looked at in relation to the local needs.

Local Areas

- What does local mean – may mean different things to different schools.
- VGS and GMIS are not under the umbrella of any management structure eg ELB or CCMS therefore able to act independently.
- Strategic analysis of the provision may highlight the options for “natural groupings” of schools. Would inform the decision making at local level.
- Could consider some “Action research” project – not pilot because schools cannot go back.
- Need to encourage those who wish to go forward – some sort of working example may help schools to see how the arrangements could work. Staged approach may be the way forward. Case studies would be very informative.
- Two issues - curricular and schools estate. Curricular discussions can be managed at a local level but provision of buildings etc must be at a strategic level.
- Not a permanent structure - process

REGIONAL GROUP

What is the role of the Regional Group?

- Advisory or executive? Delegated functions.
- Regional group should be advisory?
 - Forum – group to get things going – to develop good practice
 - Statutory group can be challenged by law – is this what we want?
 - Need for arbitration
 - If statutory it would impact on the current role of managing authorities.
 - Sub-group of SAG with remit to draw up template for the schools estate – with lead person/ support officer
 - Enabling strategy – mechanisms to assist with implementation
 - Look at changes and assess against set of criteria – assist change in a flexible manner.
- Short term remit to assist with the implementation of new arrangements

What are the functions of the Regional Group?

- Facilitating multi- managing authority development proposals
- Template provides vision – markers as to what will be reasonable
- Less mixed messages – more consistency
- Entitlement Framework is the template
- Guidance to protect those who are involved in the change process
- Set up matrix, ensure understanding, critical advice/support
- Try to make the arrangements smart
- Clear direction on how the partnerships will work – alliances
- Robust hard criteria drawn up by DE

Other issues

- Need information before structures
- Information, data will be needed
- Critical friend? Do we need facilitators?
- Provide support from a range of officers from the top body operating at a regional level – tentacles
- Trustee concept – protecting the system for future generations
- Need to protect young people and the education they receive in schools
- All structures must be RPA Proofed

Who is on the Regional Group?

- SAG representatives
- Primarily providers of schools

What is decided locally/strategically?

- Need local area descriptor – different for urban/rural
- Current providers of schools will decide locally

Who is it accountable to?

- DE

Who supports local groups?

- DE has obligation to ensure support
- Managing authorities have a role
- More work in designing the template less support needed

LOCAL GROUPS

Q1. Do local groups require support?

- If put in place now it may be perceived that it will always be available – can we afford this

Q2. Who will provide support?

- Secondments? – 3yrs
- Maximise the use of existing resources:-
 - CASS? Bolt on? Change? – Properly resourced
 - RTU – Bolt on? Change?
- Look at other places such as Wales and Scotland
- Lead Board – team resourced to do this with representatives from other providers

Q3. Who defines the local area?

- From local initiatives
- Guidance based on natural groupings
- Based on information about availability of provision both schools and FE provision