

RPA Chairpersons Meeting 15 November 2007 at Marketplace Theatre, Armagh.

Present: Sally McKee (GTCNI)
Marie Donnell (SELB)
Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)
Lawson McDonald (SEELB)
Aodán Mac Póilin (CnaG)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
Rev Robert Herron (Welb)
David McKee (CCEA)
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)
Una O’Kane (Vice Chair, Staff Com)
Maire Young (YCNI)

Will Haire (DE)
Dr Eddie Rooney (DE)
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

Apologies: Jim Rogers (BELB)
Prof Bernard Cullen (Staff Com)
Douglas Osler (SEELB)
Education Minister Caitríona Ruane

In attendance: Dr Mark Browne (ESAIT)
Mary Cromey (DE)
Fearghal O’Reilly (DE)

- Will Haire opened the meeting forwarding apologies from the Education Minister who had been supporting the Principals of the schools in Omagh attended by the children who tragically died in a house fire.
- The minutes from the previous meeting on October 10 were agreed. It was also agreed that the minutes of this meeting would be sent out, in draft, as soon as possible after the meeting to all members and to their Chief Executives to ensure that the latter are kept informed.
- Will Haire gave an update on the draft Programme for Government (PFG) and the Budget papers which were both published on the 25 October. There is a 12 week consultation on these and will close in January. The finance team in the Department will be working closely with the finance officers of the Education and Library Boards. It was welcomed that the SELB were hosting a DFP meeting on the budget.
- Will Haire reported that there was a strong emphasis in the PFG on economic development and reform. Education was seen as being not only core to the economic argument but also to inclusion.

- The high-level figures for the draft budget indicated a figure of £700 million for education infrastructure over the next three years which allows the continuing of the 100 new school projects. .
- The education resource budget will therefore increase from £1.7billion pounds to £1.95 billion pounds by 2010/11 In what was a tightening budgetary climate education had proportionately achieved as good an allocation as was possible, although tough decisions would have to be made.
- The Finance Minister had established a taskforce, led by Ed Vernon, to look at best use of departmental assets over the next 4-5 years. This would be a major challenge for education particularly in relation to ownership of schools. Funding had been secured from the Invest to Save budget for the creation and formation of the ESA
- An Efficiency Unit is being set up by DFP to scrutinise public sector delivery. Eighty per cent of DE's budget represents staff costs but there is a need for efficiencies. It may take a while because there are challenging issues.
- The Education Committee in the Assembly will report to the Finance Committee before the end of November. There will then be Assembly debates and the consultation on the PFG and the Budget will close in January. It was acknowledged that the Education Minister has difficult decisions to make in relation to the budget.
- Will Haire advised the Chairpersons of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent decision to restrict access to the End of Year Flexibility (EYF) to £125 million. It was acknowledged by Will Haire that the boards and education in general rely on EYF although schools are protected but in relation to boards, it cannot be automatic for the year ahead. ELBs will have access to the money eventually.
- End Year Flexibility on capital would also be restricted, and detailed planning of the schools estate would be very tight as of necessity.
- Alderman Beggs expressed shock at this decision from the Chancellor which would be a severe blow to the work and planning of the ELBs. Alderman Beggs asked what incentive there was for the Boards to manage this and not to over spend?
- Will Haire noted Alderman Beggs concerns and advised that the information had been passed to the Chief Executives as soon as DE was made aware of this development earlier in the year. Organisations needed to employ tighter management structures but this would pay off eventually. Catherine Daly and her team were working closely with the Boards on this issue.
- Marie Donnell mentioned reports in the national press about schools not spending money so their money was allocated to other areas. Will noted that this proposal appear to have been dropped in Whitehall. There were however

accountability issues regarding surpluses and deficits which will involve a great deal of hard work. There are also complex issues around refunds between some ELBs and schools. To help address this, careful planning was necessary on the part of schools, and hence the emphasis being placed on school development plans and financial planning. A great deal of work was being carried forward by the Boards on this issue.

- Marie Young asked about the youth service. Will acknowledged the tightness of youth and early years budgets. He also noted that education inflation was running ahead of ordinary inflation.
- Sally McKee said that if £700 million was being made available for new school buildings, what is the Minister planning to do about the transfer procedure as you cannot plan for new schools if the transfer procedure will happen at age 14 as has been indicated in the press. Will responded that the minister has not taken any decisions yet on the transfer procedure and has only said that key decisions in school life are taken at age 14. DE has carefully considered the various proposals in relation to new schools and is confident that what schools are built can be used.
- Marie Donnell asked that the success of the two tier system in the Craigavon area (Dickson Plan) be recognised.
- Reverend Herron wanted to clarify whether or not capital monies can be carried forward under the EYF.
- Eddie Rooney responded by explaining that this cannot be guaranteed in future as carry over will not be automatic.
- Will Haire stressed the need for very good project management of all school builds, and advised that the recently established framework agreements allowed more rapid progressing of work.
- Lawson McDonald mentioned the problems of maintenance overhang and Aodán Mac Póilin asked if fast-track building in the Irish Medium sector would be affected. Lawson asked how will it affect ESA, will they get the money back from the Chancellor? Aodán said there was a fast track building scheme in Irish medium schools and wanted to know the mechanics of the budget roll over, if schools are protected will it be factored in as an under-spend or will there be a balancing act between budgets?
- Will Haire advised that ELBs now have tighter control of budgets and said that the education financing of schools requires an under-spend to some degree. He explained the Club Bank process' that works within the Integrated Education and the consideration that was being given to future systems.
- Will Haire informed the Chairpersons that the consultation on Policy paper 21 – Sectoral Support Post RPA, closes on the 14th December and he encouraged all to make their responses to the paper as it is important to get the relationship of sectoral support right.

- Gavin Boyd then delivered a presentation on managing the change programme that would lead to establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. He highlighted key projects under way including:
 - Financial Planning
 - Staff Issues
 - Restructuring of ICT/Communications and
 - Service Delivery Planning
- In considering the services to be delivered, Gavin categorised these into 3 types:
 - Those which would Transfer broadly in line with current arrangements but with management reorganised on a regional basis eg Transport and School Meals;
 - Those which would be Transformed, or radically changed – mostly corporate services such as Finance, Accounts and Payroll and
 - Those which would be Innovated – new or enhanced services such as Education Standards, Children’s Services and Area Planning
- Gavin said that the Department made it clear that improving outcomes for all is a top priority and there should be support for the leadership in this.
- Gavin outlined the key milestones in the Programme, and advised of further presentations to CEOs (21 November), 2nd Tier Officers (29 November), Unions and HR Managers (4 December). He outlined his current thinking with regard to the ESA management structure. A final version will be drafted and sent to DE for approval in January. He has drawn on the expertise of the ELBs and RPA affected bodies to date. He confirmed he will be meeting with the CEOs shortly to discuss further. He also said he is grateful for the continued encouragement and support from the different organisations.
- Una O’Kane commented positively on the management structure Gavin had presented and the categorisation of services to be delivered. She urged that the services under Innovate would be given the same priority as those under Transfer and Transform.
- Sally McKee stated that teachers have often had innovation thrust upon them and wanted to know how the ESA and DE are going to engage with teachers and other stakeholders to ensure that they all had a voice in the formation and development of ESA.
- Will Haire responded by saying that there is open consultation on the policy documents and this will be of great assistance in identifying direction, helping to deliver ESA and related legislation. Gavin also meets regularly with stakeholders and takes their views. Gavin noted that his rationale was really about improvement of education and innovation would be key to this. Already within the system there are a number of organisations which have demonstrated very clearly how things can be turned around, and support and professional development for leaders and teachers was a key element. He also

highlighted that the process of engagement with principals had started 6 months ago when focus groups were put in place.

- Bishop McAreavey wanted the ESA and DE to examine ways of involving parents, whom he saw as key stakeholders in the process. He noted that a communications strategy was essential.
- Will Haire mentioned some examples of good practice eg the DFES website which had a specific area for the role and information for parents.
- Eddie Rooney noted that the RPA statement included a commitment to engage with parents and young people, as well as principals and other staff. A paper will be going to the minister shortly on the formation of an Education Advisory Forum.
- David McKee said that consultation on the ESA should not be about ticking corporate boxes and that there should be room for involving more people in the consultation. He quoted the example of Iceland's Youth and Parent Councils.
- Reverend Herron, Una O'Kane, and Bishop McAreavey made points that school governors, the controlled sector and parents all needed to be consulted and communicated with.
- Will Haire said that it was difficult for staff as we have a small resource and we have to be realistic in what can be achieved in terms of communication.
- Eddie Rooney gave an update on the legislative side:
 - Bill one is nearing completion
 - There are instructions in place for day 1
 - It is a very detailed process, one paper alone had over 1200 amendments.
 - The legislation is progressing well.
- In relation to area planning on Bill 2, the consultation on this and discussion will begin before Christmas 2007. Also the consultation on Controlled schools will begin before Christmas 2007 as well. The EAF will be considered by the minister shortly.
- The meeting drew to a close at 1540.

Please note the next meeting is on 16 January 2008 at Ballybot House, Newry from 1530 – 1700.