

RPA Chairpersons Forum: 26 January 2009
The Speakers Room (Room 106) Parliament Buildings

Present: Education Minister Caitríona Ruane MLA
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)
Peter Duffy (WELB)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
Bertie Faulkner (YCNI)
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Marie Donnell (SELB)
Sally McKee (GTCNI)
David McKee (CCEA)
Pat Carvill (SEELB)
Una O’Kane (Staff Comm)
Caoimhín Ó Peatáin (CnaG)
Gerry Carson (BELB)

Will Haire (DE)
John McGrath (DE)
Joe Reynolds (DE)
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

Apologies: Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)
Douglas Osler (SEELB)
Councillor Jim Rodgers (BELB)
Professor Bernard Cullen (Staff Comm)
Maire Young (YCNI)
Sean Mag Uidir (InaG)

In attendance: Peter O’Neill (DE)
John McCourt (DE)

The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. The Minister gave an update on progress since the last meeting, highlighting progress with the legislation and ongoing scrutiny by the Education Committee. While pointing out that the Committee was likely to seek an extension to the end of September to scrutinise the legislation, the Minister pointed out that this should not delay the establishment of the ESA on 1 January 2010. The Department was pressing ahead in dealing with the many operational matters that needed to be dealt with to establish the ESA. The Minister emphasised that equality of opportunity was at the core of the implementation of the RPA and stressed the need for a seamless transition to the new ESA.

Minutes

Members confirmed that they were content with the minutes of the previous meeting (held on 17 September 2008).

Legislation Update

John McGrath gave an update on progress with the legislation and outlined the topics discussed at recent sessions with the Education Committee and those scheduled in the coming weeks. John advised that essentially the Committee was trying to get a clear view of what the new world under ESA would look like. Bertie Faulkner asked if papers prepared for the Education Committee could be copied to the Chairs for information and Will Haire agreed that he would check to see if this could be done.

[Action: Will Haire]

Preparation for ESA

Gavin Boyd updated chairs on progress with work on redesigning the range of different services which would become the responsibility of ESA (while emphasising the split of services to be managed regionally and locally). He advised that the new structure of directorates needed to be consulted on more widely prior to being signed off centrally. It was hoped that recruitment for new directors would commence in April.

[The Minister left at 15.25.]

Members raised concerns about the impact of the appointment of new directors to ESA on the ability of the existing organisations to function and it was agreed that the process would need to be properly managed, with careful consideration being given as to when it was possible to allow individuals to leave.

Business Continuity

Members were invited to provide details of the impact that the implementation of RPA was having on their organisations. Members raised the following issues:-

- While some organisations were (because of the implementation of vacancy control and the loss of key staff) struggling to deliver services, others were confident that they could manage.
- CCEA had concerns about future accommodation and the need to extend or enter into a new lease.
- NICIE needed clarity as to what its role might be in the future – it had submitted a draft business plan to DE for consideration.
- There was a danger that influence and commitment of Boards and Committees could be diminished.

Convergence

Gavin Boyd informed members that the principle focus of convergence had in the last six months changed from the 'back office' to raising standards in line with DE's policy (Every School a Good School). Will Haire added that the main focus would be on delivering the required services to children with the development of other supporting services being gradual – DE would establish basic principles upon which ESA would operate and frame developments. It was stressed that it was important to ensure that convergence did not cause disruption to children in schools or in the Youth Service.

Mr Beggs suggested that a role could be found for retaining Board members to assist with the transition arrangements before and after 1 January 2010. Will Haire and Gavin Boyd agreed to consider this proposal.

[Action: Will Haire & Gavin Boyd]

Planning for 2009-10

John McGrath provided an update and pointed out that the budget position for 2009-10 was likely to be very difficult - the outcome of a recent strategic stocktake had flagged up pressures amounting to some £60m. In the circumstances hard decisions would have to be made and there was a need to get clear picture of priorities. It was confirmed that ESA would be operating a shadow budget for the 2009/10 financial year and that DE would be liaising closely with the ELBs throughout the year on the monitoring of their budgets.

Board Membership

The meeting was advised that approval had been obtained to an extension of the lifespan for existing Board Membership up to 31 December 2009. Will Haire agreed to check if Members of Boards had been advised of the extension to their tenure of office.

[Action: Will Haire]

AOB

Future meetings of the group would take place every 6-8 weeks.

The meeting closed at 16:40.