

RPA Chairpersons Forum: 20 May 2009 – Boardroom, Middletown Centre for Autism

Present: Education Minister Caitriona Ruane MLA
Mrs Pat Carvill (CCMS)
Peter Duffy (WELB)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Gerry Carson (BELB)
David McKee (CCEA)
Pat Carvill (SEELB)
Derek Capper (YCNl)
Professor Bernard Cullen (Staff Comm)
Caoimhín Ó Peatáin (CnaG)
Marie Donnell (SELB)

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

Apologies: Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)
Douglas Osler (SEELB)
Sally McKee (GTCNI)
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)
Róise ní Bhaoill (InaG)
Councillor Jim Rodgers (BELB)
Maire Young (YCNl)

In attendance: Michael Henderson (DE)
John McCourt (DE)

The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance.

Minutes

Members confirmed that they were content with the minutes of the previous meeting (held on 25 March 2009).

Legislation Update

The Minister advised that the Education Committee is continuing with its consideration of the RPA Legislation and that this is expected to end during September to allow the Bill to complete its other Stages during the autumn in time to allow for implementation from 1 January 2010. John McGrath added that officials are continuing to meet with the Committee to provide clarification on issues raised during its consultation process and that a paper is expected imminently from the Committee outlining its suggested amendments to the Bill. Once this is received, the Minister will reply to the issues raised with the aim of moving the Bill forward.

Will Haire added that the contents of Bill 2 have also been discussed with the Committee and good progress has been made on policy issues including Area Based Planning and other issues on which public consultation had already taken place.

Actions Arising

Will Haire advised that he had written to Chairpersons on 10 April explaining that Gavin Boyd would be appointed as a Second Accounting Officer in line with best practice and that in the run up to January 2010, they would be meeting with ELB Accounting Officers on a two monthly basis. Gavin explained that he would be meeting them monthly. Will also thanked the Chairs for their help in ensuring that the budgets allocated were spent and that no significant under spends occurred. John McGrath added that it is essential that two-way communication continues between the department and the organisations to ensure the smooth transition from separate organisational accounts to a unitary set of accounts under ESA. Mr Carson stressed the reality of the financial difficulties facing BELB over the preceding period.

Progress on Implementation

ESA –

Gavin Boyd updated the group on progress within ESAIT. The beginning of the process for expressions of interest in voluntary severance for senior managers has been widened due to the comments received during the consultation period, with first offers expected by mid-July. The second ESAIT communications survey has been completed with returns indicating that staff are broadly happy with present communications but would welcome more face-to-face presentations. Work is continuing with Chief Executives on a range of issues including account maintenance systems and special education and this work will continue and intensify over the next seven months. ESAIT are working with RTU to provide seminars on School Improvement and Raising Standards in line with the Minister's priorities and aims.

The Minister in replying to the issue of location stated that all decisions on location would be made by herself but that equality would be to the forefront and that ESA would be a decentralised organisation.

DE –

John McGrath provided the group with an update on transformation issues within DE. New organisational structures and Directors (which the Chairs had been informed of by letter on 1 May) have been in place since 6 May. Work is continuing to finalise the list of functions and staff which will transfer from the Department to ESA on 1 January. An advertisement for a new Director of Education Workforce Development has been placed in the press.

In response to a question regarding the Business Plans for sectoral support bodies, John replied that these would be signed off in the coming months.

Managing the Transition

The Minister advised that it will be a challenging year in the run up to establishment of ESA and the winding down of the existing organisations. It will be essential that affairs are managed diligently to ensure that front line services are not affected and how this process will work was outlined in Will Haire's letter of 10 April to the Chairs. The Minister stressed her concern that if the change doesn't happen as and when planned, it will be schools who are most affected.

John McGrath added that the Transition Board will manage and oversee this transition but it is the responsibility of everyone collectively to communicate with each other to ensure the transition is managed corporately. John added that the department had commissioned a Gateway Review of the RPA which was due to finish by 7 August 2009.

AOB

In response to a question regarding the funding for the Middletown Centre for Autism, the Minister replied that this was a priority project and a lot of good work had already been carried out and that the work would continue. The Minister added that this was reflected in the feedback that she had received from various Principals.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in Enniskillen during September with a venue to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 16.40.