

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE STEERING GROUP OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 26 JANUARY 2005 IN STAFF COMMISSION OFFICES

Present:-

Community & Voluntary Sector

Ms T Hutchinson	NICEM (Joint Chair)
Ms G Loughran	Save the Children
Mr M Graves	Ulster Teachers' Union
Ms P Haren	Women's Support Network
Ms A Stephens	YouthNet

Public Authorities

Mr J Curran	E&LBs (Joint Chair)
Ms D Vaughn	S C – (Secretary)
Mrs A Bennett	CCEA
Ms H Leith	CCMS
Mr J Brown	Department of Education
Mr T Heron	SELB (representing the 5 E&LBs)

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Ms M Field, (sub. Ms A Stephens), Ms L Johnston, (sub. Mrs A Bennett), Ms S Chamberlain (sub. Ms G Loughran), Mr D Guilfoyle, Dr D McConnell, Mr T Wright and Ms H Ferguson.

Welcome and Introduction

Tansy Hutchinson welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Steering Group and explained that the idea for the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) had arisen out of the E U funded project 'Anti-discrimination and Diversity in Action'. She said that the Forum brought together the education sector and the community and voluntary sector as partners and provided a platform whereby key issues could be addressed. She said that the Steering Group would be used as a mechanism whereby work could be progressed between Forum meetings.

2. Feedback on Quarterly Update and Operation of the Steering Group

- 2.1 Members noted the report of the Officers of the Joint Consultative Forum meeting held on Thursday, 6 January 2005. This report set out the Officers' recommendations/proposals based on the feedback received on the Quarterly Update and Arrangements for the Steering Group.
- 2.2 Members agreed the report in its entirety. *(A copy of the report is attached as an Appendix)*

3. Implementation of the “Education Communities” Equality Schemes

- 3.1** Tansy thanked Ms Vaugh for preparing the draft paper on the overview of the implementation of the Education Authorities’ Equality Schemes and asked Ms Vaugh to talk members through the paper.
- 3.2** Ms Vaugh explained that the paper was a first draft which provided a brief outline on progress made in relation to the key elements of the Public Authorities’ Equality Schemes and said that the draft could be amended and updated as required. She reported that the Department of Education had carried out a major review of its EQIA timetable and was hoping to publish a document for consultation within the next month. Ms Vaugh said that, following this, the paper would be updated to reflect the Department’s revised EQIA timetable and she asked members, when they had had an opportunity to go through the draft, to let her have any comments or suggestions they may have on its format and content.
- 3.3** Mike Graves pointed out that he had a query regarding the impact assessment programme and the accuracy of one of the sections which he undertook to raise with the Secretary at the end of the meeting.
- 3.4** Tansy indicated that Section 7, which provided a breakdown of complaints, appeared inaccurate in that NICEM had raised two complaints with the Department. She undertook to discuss the matter further with the Department representative at the conclusion of the meeting.
- 3.5** Following discussion with regard to the updating of the overview it was agreed that it would be updated prior to meetings of the Joint Consultative Forum and that the information leaflet would highlight that the overview was available on the Staff Commission’s website and invite feedback.

<p>Action: Overview document to be updated prior to meetings of the Joint Consultative Forum; Quarterly update leaflet to indicate that Overview is available on the Staff Commission’s website and request feedback on content and format.</p>
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4. What Role Does “Informal” Accredited Education have to play within our Education System?

- 4.1** Patricia Haren from the Women’s Support Network was asked to introduce this item since she had requested that it to be placed on the agenda. Patricia explained that the voluntary sector delivered a considerable amount of training directly linked to the education sector i.e., youth and pre school training in their Women Centres. She said that the Women’s Centres provided childcare facilities to enable women, particularly those who would not have the opportunity to attend courses in Further Education Colleges, to undertake this training. Patricia said that funding was a major issue and enquired where this type of training stood within the education system given that the training was provided across the community and the Section 75 equality categories and said that she felt this type of training needed to be given a higher profile.

- 4.2 Following discussion Deirdre suggested that there may be merit in linking with the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) to explore how links could be formalised with the further education sector. The Department also undertook to consider the issues raised.

Action:- The Secretary to organise a meeting with the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges and the Women's Support Network. The Department to consider the issues raised.

5. Cuts in Public Expenditure – Impact on Service Delivery (*Race Sector*)

- 5.1 Members noted that NICEM had requested that this item be placed on the agenda. Terry Heron, Chief Finance Officer Southern Education and Library Board was invited to outline the Boards' financial position in relation to the *current under-funding difficulties and the 2.5% projected and cumulative savings over the next three years.*
- 5.2 Terry explained that the Boards were funded by three Departments namely the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. He stated that the Belfast and South Eastern Boards had declared an overspend in their budgets as at March 2004 and pointed out that while the other three Boards were not overspent he believed that the problem of under-funding was now a five Board issue.

He circulated copies of a presentation he had made to his Board and explained that while the figures were based on the Southern Board, they applied to all five Boards in respect of how the budget was allocated. He advised members that as yet there had been no 'cuts' in the budget allocation and that the Department of Education had not made its budget allocations for the period 2005/06.

Terry outlined for members how the Boards spent their budget under the following headings:-

- Allocation to schools
- Special Education including Peripatetic Teaching Service
- Catering
- Road Safety
- CASS
- Teacher/Resource Centres
- Music
- Education Welfare
- School Libraries
- Headquarters
- Miscellaneous
- Delegated schools

He indicated that the majority of each Board's budget went directly to schools which, in the case of the Southern Board was £151.5m out of its £219m budget. This money was controlled by each school's Board of Governors. He then explained, given the

current under-funding of the five Education and Library Boards, the likely financial impact of the:-

- 2.5% efficiency saving to be achieved on a cumulative basis over the next 3 years; and
- projected under-funding of Education and Library Boards services over the next 3 years.

Terry distinguished between the Boards' statutory and non-statutory services and emphasised that until the Department had announced the budget allocations for 2005/06 the Boards' would be unable to make any firm decisions regarding how the efficiency savings could be achieved. He said that the Boards recognised the requirement to consult from an equality perspective and would try to do this on a five Board basis.

Terry referred to the changes to the funding of the Library Service and said that from the next financial year the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) would be specifying how much should be spent on books and maintenance and the remainder of the allocated budget would be used to operate the library service. He said that the Boards believed that the new funding mechanism may hinder Boards in maintaining the current library provision.

Tansy thanked Terry for his comprehensive presentation which had brought enormous clarity to the current position.

During the subsequent discussion the following points emerged:-

- concern that those already marginalised will be the worst affected; (*Race sector*);
- the potential impact on the lower paid jobs within the Education and Library Service which would have a greater impact on women (*Women's Sector*);
- Dr David McConnell, prior to the meeting, had raised concerns about the speculation re library closures and asked that the OFMDFM Report 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society' be considered. He asked that it be recorded that it was his view that if the Belfast Board proposed to close a number of libraries as speculated in the press it would have a negative impact on older people and would, in his view, require to be impact assessed (*Age Concern*);
- has an examination been conducted to establish the benefits of centralised services? (*Ulster Teachers Union*);
- cuts in service delivery were likely to have a negative impact on an already overstretched voluntary sector in that it would be forced to fill the gaps which emerged in service delivery; (*Women's Sector*)
- the idea of a communications officer and/or the setting up of a small working group (*Ulster Teachers Union*);

In response to the points raised the Board officers pointed out that each Board had individual statutory duties and accountability responsibilities which must be fulfilled. However, a substantial amount of work was taken forward on an integrated/centralised basis, for example, the equality duties, joint legal service, regional training unit and C2K. Where services could not be centrally co-ordinated because of statutory obligations good practice was shared across the Boards.

It was agreed, on behalf of the Boards, that when the five Education and Library Boards had received their budgets and formulated their proposals a special meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum would be convened.

Action:- The Officers to convene a special meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum when the financial position of the Boards was clear and proposals had been formulated.

6. Reviewing R E Education (Belfast Jewish Community)

- 6.1** Ms Vaugh reported that Paula Tabakin from the Jewish Community had requested that this item be placed on the agenda and she circulated a paper which provided 'back up' information relating to this item. Ms Vaugh explained that the Department of Education had stated in its Annual Report to the Equality Commission that an EQIA on the 'Revised Religious Education and Core Syllabus' was scheduled for 2005/06 and she suggested that the issues raised should be fed into the EQIA process.
- 6.2** Tansy pointed out it was NICEM's view that an earlier review of the R E Curriculum breached both Section 75 and the Race Relations legislation and that NICEM had lodged a formal complaint to the Department on the conduct of the review.
- 6.3** Following discussion the Department of Education and the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessments (CCEA) undertook to consider the issues raised and provide a response to the paper tabled.

Action:- The issues raised in the paper to be fed into the EQIA process. Department of Education and CCEA to consider the issues and provide a response for the next Steering Group meeting.

7. Other Relevant Business

7.1 Count Me In – Exploring Cultural Diversity Amongst Children and Youth People

Ms Vaugh circulated members with copies of the above research commissioned by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland with funding from the Department of Education and said that the research had been conducted by Save the Children in association with the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities. She reported that Katy Radford had asked her to draw members' attention to the report and in particular recommendations 12 and 13 on page 37, namely:-

12. *The Department of Education and Department of Employment and Learning should fund the Education and Library Boards to support the provision of resources and the formation of peripatetic posts charged with looking specifically at the needs of children from minority ethnic communities and with multiple heritage background. This should include a greater range in the teaching of minority ethnic language options in schools where there is a need.*
13. *The Department of Education, on issuing guidance on the time-tabling for school holidays and vocational youth work, should place equal value on non-Christian holidays when schools are distributing the allocated days. A greater focus should also be placed on culturally specific training for teachers and youth workers.*

Following discussion the Department of Education undertook to consider the findings of this Report, in particular, how the recommendations 12 and 13 could be addressed. It was agreed to place this item on the agenda for the next meeting of the Steering Group.

Action:- Department of Education to consider the findings of this Report and how recommendations 12 and 13 could be addressed. Item to be placed on the Steering Group's agenda.

7.2 Shout Report

The Secretary referred to the presentation given by Dennis Palmer, YouthNet, at the preliminary meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum. She said that she had been asked to raise the issue of the recommendations contained in the report and in particular the appointment of a taskforce.

Tansy reported that James Knox, CoSO, had asked her to raise the issue of bullying with the Steering Group and said that this could be addressed under this item.

Following discussion the Department of Education agreed to consider how the recommendations could be progressed.

Action:- The Department of Education to consider how the recommendations, in particular the appointment of a taskforce as detailed at page 19 be progressed.

8. Agreed Dates for Meetings of the Steering Group and Joint Consultative Forum

Steering Group

It was agreed that the Steering Group would meet on the following dates:-

- Thursday, 21 April 2005 at 2.00 p.m. at the offices of CCMS
- Thursday, 29 September 2005 at 2.00 p.m. at the offices of Ulster Teachers' Union

Joint Consultative Forum

It was agreed to arrange a special meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum as soon as the financial position in Boards was clear and proposals have been formulated.

It was also agreed that the Joint Consultative Forum would meet on the following dates:-

- Thursday, 26 May 2005 at 2.00 p.m. – venue to be arranged
- Thursday, 13 October 2005 at 2.00 p.m. at the Department of Education

Meeting of the Officers of the Joint Consultative Forum held on Thursday, 6 January 2005 at the Staff Commission offices

1. Feedback on the Quarterly Update and the Arrangements for the Steering Group

It was noted that 14 responses had been received.

Officers agreed the following in relation to the membership of the Steering Group:-

- **Public Authorities** – all specified public authorities have a representative on the Steering Group, only exception is the five Education and Library Boards who would share a seat on a rotational basis.
- **Equality Authorities** – one representative on a rotational basis.
- **Trade Unions** - one representative from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council and one from the Joint Negotiating Council for non-teaching staff to serve on the Steering Group for the first year with rotational membership thereafter;
- **Age** – given the diversity within this group and relationships with the Education and Library Boards, amend to three representatives – (young children, youth and older persons);
- **Disability** – check if the representative from Disability Action could also represent the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance;
- **Race** – NICEM to consult their constituent members and other ethnic minority groups regarding membership of the Steering Group and the issue raised;
- **Sexual Orientation** – CoSO;
- **Religion** – Inter-Faith Forum
- **Gender** – ask Women's Support Network to consult Women's Groups regarding membership of the Steering Group and issue raised.

The membership of the Steering Group would therefore be as outlined in Annex 1 of this report.

In relation to the issues raised on the operation of the Steering Group. It was agreed to recommend to the Group that:-

- **Rotational Membership** – membership to rotate within each sector on a yearly basis;

- **Reserves** – if a representative cannot attend a Steering Group meeting it will be their responsibility to ensure that a substitute is appointed to represent their organisation;
- **Communication of Information** – following each meeting Officers to agree the content of a user-friendly leaflet to update members on the work of the Steering Group. Minutes, when agreed, to be posted on Staff Commission's website, all members of the Joint Consultative Forum to be advised of this decision;

2. Draft Agenda

Officers agreed the draft agenda subject to the following amendment:-

Item 3 add *'(paper to be tabled to facilitate an initial discussion)'*