

MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE STEERING GROUP OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2005 IN STAFF COMMISSION OFFICES

Present:-

Community & Voluntary Sector

Ms T Hutchinson	NICEM (Joint Chair)
Dr D McConnell	Age Concern
Mr N Richardson	Inter-Faith Forum
Mrs A Millar	NIPSA
Mr D Simpson	Save the Children
Ms E Campbell	Youthnet

Public Authorities

Mr J Curran	E&LBs (Joint Chair)
Ms H Leith	CCMS
Mrs S Lawlor	D E
Mr J Brown	D E
Mr D Lee	NICIE
Ms D Vaugh	S C – (Secretary)
Ms P Murray	S C

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr D Guilfoyle, Mr M Graves Ms L Johnston, Ms E Teague, and Mr T Heron.

2. Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 11 May 2005

- 2.1 The minutes of the second meeting of the Steering Group were agreed as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:-

Page 4 item 3.4.5 to read 'Helen reported that CCMS was part of a working group ..'

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Cuts in Public Expenditure

- 3.1.1 John referred to the briefing on the cuts in public expenditure given by Terry Heron, Chief Finance Officer – Southern Board, at the Steering Group meeting held on 26 January 2005 and said that Terry would be willing to give a briefing to the Forum following the publication of the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) draft proposals in terms of the division of public funding 2006/07). He explained that D F P would be holding consultation meetings on the draft proposals and said that when details of the meetings became available they would be circulated to members.

- 3.1.2 The Secretary circulated copies of the Department's letter to the Boards setting out the allocation per Board of the additional £12.5 m for education. She pointed out that the additional funding was specifically to meet pressures across the school sectors related to special educational needs, school meals and maintenance and emphasised that all of the allocations were earmarked.

- 3.1.3 Members noted the following allocations per Board:-

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
Special Educational Needs	659,000	640,000	729,000	659,000	617,000
Maintenance	334,000	428,000	382,000	449,000	358,000
School Meals*	101,000	71,000	111,000	140,000	218,000
Total	1,094,000	1,139,000	1,222,000	1,248,000	1,193,000

*This allocation is to improve the quality of school meals.

3.1.4 John reported that Board representatives were to meet with Departmental officials on the 26 October 2005 to discuss the development of shared services. He said that he had been charged by the Chief Executives to take forward the shared services initiative and said that he saw this as an opportunity to proactively describe how a range of Board services could best be re-configured to deliver the services for the future. He said that he would be making a presentation to the Department and confirmed that the requirement to have detailed consultation with the recognised Trade Unions, staff and the Section 75 equality groups would be included in the presentation. He asked members if they had any points or concerns which they felt should be included in the presentation to the Department to let him know by Tuesday, 25 October 2005.

3.1.5 Discussion took place on how best to raise the issue of shared services, the current financial position and the projected financial position (2006 – 2007) with those most affected and the following action was agreed:-

Action: The Secretary to prepare an information leaflet highlighting that a presentation would be provided by the Boards on (a) Sharing Services; (b) Boards' current financial position and (c) Projected Financial position (2006 – 2007) at the Joint Consultative Forum meeting on 30 November 2005.
Details on the Department of Finance & Personnel's consultation meetings, when, available, to be notified to members.

3.1.6 The Secretary reported that the Consultation Document on the Boards' Resource Allocation Plans for 2005/06 was issued on 31 May 2005. All requests for meetings were facilitated and thirty-two written responses were received. A report on feedback received from consultees was issued in August 2005. Lobbying on the cuts is still ongoing i.e. Withdrawal of Transport at 2.00 p.m. Boards have set in place an Action Plan which is currently being implemented, Boards will provide feedback to consultees on a rolling basis.

3.1.7 David McConnell expressed concern regarding the North Eastern Board's screening of library closures and the Belfast Board's changes to library hours and reported that because these situations had been overtaken by events he had not made a formal complaint under Schedule 10 to the Equality Commission. He also referred to the Screening Report and in particular the review of School Crossing Patrols and said that while the report gave a detailed description of how some of the patrols were removed it was unclear whether the LARSOA Guidelines were applied in all case.

3.1.8 The Secretary said that it was her understanding that the LARSOA Guidelines had been applied in all cases and undertook to clarify the position with the Boards.

E A L Provision

3.1.9 Sharon informed members that the Department had prepared a first draft of the EAL policy and was working with the Boards, CCMS, CCEA and NICIE and would be setting up a Policy Group. She indicated that, in the first instance, the Department would be holding consultations in November 2005 with teachers from six schools from each Board area. She reported that the Education Training Inspectorate would be conducting a survey with twenty schools to assess how the Common Funding Formula was 'bedding in'. Sharon also reported that she would shortly be meeting Board officers to discuss collaborative working and to explore the scope for the creation of a centralised shared service to provide EAL support.

3.1.10 Tansy noted Sharon's comments and informed members that NICEM had previously requested the Minister to convene a policy group, which would include NICEM and the relevant trade unions, to look at the future provision of EAL.

3.1.11 Sharon explained to members that since the Department did not have the required skills to consult with parents and children from ethnic minorities it was proposing to issue a tender document seeking to employ an organisation to assist it in the consultation process.

3.1.12 Discussion took place on the best way for the Department to conduct the consultation exercise and the following points were put forward:-

- › A good practice model in relation to consultation is where the Department concerned works in partnership with a range of organisations to facilitate consultation with the organisations' constituents;
- › The possibility of the Department providing resources for organisations to facilitate consultation with their constituents. It was noted that this method was used by OFMDFM in its consultation on the Race Equality Strategy.
- › Organisations may wish a representative from the Department to be present at the consultation meetings and discussion could be facilitated through an interpreter;
- › Consultation should not be restricted to ethnic minority groups;
- › Consultation should not be restricted to teachers' unions. Contact with other Trade Unions could be achieved through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.
- › The Boards' Central Management Support Unit (CMSU) has conducted fundamental reviews of the Youth Service and the School Meals Service and consultation for both reviews were Section 75 compliant. CMSU could provide assistance and advice to the Department in relation to the consultation exercise.

3.2 Implementation of the 'Education Communities' Equality Schemes

3.2.1 The Secretary reported that the 'Overview' document on the education communities' Equality Schemes had been updated as far as possible and had been forwarded to the public authorities to ensure that the information included was correct. It was hoped that the document would be on the website before the next Forum meeting.

3.3 What Role Does “Informal” Accredited Education have to play within our Education System?

3.3.1 The Secretary reported that CCEA had provided contact details in relation to this issue and that this would be forwarded to the Women’s Support Network to follow up.

3.4 Revision of Religious Education Core Syllabus

3.4.1 Jeff reported that pre consultation meetings had commenced on the proposal put forward by the drafting group and stated that it was intended to carry out the EQIA on the proposal as drafted and carry out consultations in December 2005. He pointed out that it was intended to consult and engage with pupils on the content of the proposed syllabus.

3.4.2 On a point of clarification Jeff confirmed that the proposal put forward by the four main Churches would form the basis for the consultation and said that issues raised would be addressed during the consultation process which would be full, open and meaningful.

3.4.3 Tansy pointed out that NICEM was not happy with the composition of the Review Group and had previously challenged this in that the interpretation of the legislation under which the Review Group was constituted predated the Human Rights Act and Section 75. She asked that the Forum be used to keep members updated on what was happening in relation to this EQIA.

Action: The Secretary to place this item on the agenda for the next Forum meeting.

3.4.4 Examinations for Jewish Religious Education for Students in Northern Ireland

As the representative from CCEA was not in attendance it was agreed that this item be placed on the agenda for the next Steering Group meeting.

Information Leaflet on School Meals Service

3.4.5 The Secretary referred to discussion at the last meeting when it had been agreed to investigate the possibility of preparing an information leaflet on the School Meals Service for parents from ethnic minorities. She referred to the ‘Welcome Pack’ produced by the Ballymena Inter-Agency Ethnic Minorities Support group (BIAES), which provided information on the whole process of how to get a child placed in a school and suggested that, rather than concentrating on just one element, it would be more effective to provide a leaflet on a wider range of information and in different languages.

3.4.6 Following discussion members noted that the following points were being considered under EAL provision:-

- the possibility of creating a website providing information for parents from ethnic minorities on ‘fixed point’ issues such as parent/teacher meetings;
- Boards bringing together their various welcome packs with the possibility of producing one pack.

Sharon confirmed that the Department had arranged a meeting to consider funding for issues such as those detailed above. In this context members agreed that this matter be progressed under the overall arrangements for EAL support.

3.4.7 Members also noted that OFMDFM had funded fifteen different Welcome Packs produced by the community and voluntary sector and that some had been developed for migrant workers.

3.5 Services 'bought in' by Boards

3.5.1 The Secretary reported that no progress had been made in relation to this item and it was agreed that it be placed on the agenda for the next Steering Group meeting.

3.6 New Board Members – Awareness Training of Section 75

3.6.1 The Secretary circulated a copy of an information pack which she had prepared for newly appointed Board members on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland 1998. She explained that the pack covered the legal framework; unlawful discrimination and the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and contained, as one of the appendices, the overview document on the education communities' equality schemes.

4. Priorities and Budget 2005 - 08

4.1 Members noted that this item had already been discussed under item 3.1 Cuts in Public Expenditure.

5. Schools' Anti-Bullying Policies

5.1 Jeff reported that the Department had commissioned the University of Ulster to conduct research into the nature and extent of bullying in Northern Ireland schools. He said that this research was a follow up to research conducted in 2002 and explained that the initial research had not included questions on racism and homophobia, however he confirmed that questions would be included in this research project. He said that the project was due to commence during October 2005 with the completion of the first report by November 2006.

5.2 Elaine referred to recent research on Homophobic Bullying carried out in England and suggested that it may be helpful to see how the questions were structured and if any lessons could be learnt to ensure that the best structure was used for the University of Ulster's research.

5.3 Members noted that the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) had commissioned research with the aim of 'determining the views and experiences of children and young people in relation to the development and review of anti-bullying policies in schools'.

5.4 With regard to schools' anti-bullying policies David Simpson explained that most schools tried to follow the Save the Children Anti-Bullying Good Practice Guide which had been launched in partnership with the Department of Education, the Boards, CCMS, CCEA and the University of Ulster. He pointed out that organisations such as Save the Children did not provide model policies as such because it was felt it was more effective for schools to go through the process of developing their own individual anti-bullying policy using the Guide.

5.5 Discussion took place on the Education Training and Inspectorate's (ETI) pastoral care and monitoring role and it was noted that the Department was carrying out a 'self audit' exercise and was collating copies of schools' anti-bullying policies. It was suggested that the ETI be invited to provide a short presentation on their pastoral care and monitoring role.

- 5.6 David Simpson informed members that the 'Anti-Bullying Forum' chaired by Save the Children was launching its initial three year Strategy Plan in November 2005. It was agreed that David would provide a brief outline of the strategy at the next Forum meeting.

Action: The Department undertook to check the possibility of the Education Training and Inspectorate providing a short presentation on its work in monitoring pastoral care which includes an anti-bullying strategy.

6. Local People, Global Faiths: Sikhs, Jews and Hindus in Northern Ireland

- 6.1 Tansy asked Norman to outline for members the publication on Local People Global Faiths which had recently been sent to the Secretary.
- 6.2 Norman stated that the publication was designed especially for Key Stage 3 Religious Education students but would also be of interest to other young people both inside and outside the classroom. He said that it was the first of a pair of textbooks designed to introduce young people to some of the major world religions and their presence in Northern Ireland and explained that the second book would feature Islam, Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith and was scheduled for publication in 2006. Norman said that the book had been written by James Nelson and himself, both lecturers in Stranmillis College with contribution from members of our local faith communities.
- 6.3 The Steering Group congratulated Norman on the excellent publication.

7. Other Relevant Business

7.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – 5 Year Review

- 7.1.1 The Secretary reported that the Equality Commission had published its "Guidance on the 5 Year Review of Equality Schemes by Public Authorities. She reported that one of the main elements of the review was 'Engagement and Consultation' on how Public Authorities were implementing their Equality Schemes. The Secretary highlighted that while the Equality Commission did not recommend that Public Authorities formally consult with all those on their consultation list it did state that it was important that engagement was maintained with Section 75 umbrella groups and that any general consultation mechanisms e.g., the Joint Consultation Forum, were fully exploited to maximise the effect of the 5 year review.

Members noted that the 5 year reviews for Public Authorities in the education sector were due to be completed as follows:-

Department of Education	8 February 2006
Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards	15 February 2006
Belfast, North Eastern, Southern and Western Education and Library Boards	15 March 2006
South Eastern Education and Library Board	12 April 2006
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	17 May 2006
Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments	14 June 2006

7.1.2 Discussion took place on the difficulties in carrying out the reviews collaboratively when they were due to be completed in the education sector on different dates and it was noted that the Department was part of an Inter-departmental group consisting of 11 other departments. Members felt that the review would lead to a considerable amount of work for both the community and voluntary sector and the public authorities and discussed the best way to ensure that the review was a useful process.

7.1.3 The Secretary suggested that there was scope within the Forum to organise roundtable discussions on our experiences of Section 75 drawing on what had been the challenges and good practice and said that this could be used to inform the review.

7.1.4 David McConnell said that he would be shortly meeting with the Chief Commissioner and would raise a number of concerns with him. It was noted that a meeting of the Equality Coalition was scheduled to take place shortly and it was anticipated that a number of issues would be raised with the Equality Commission in relation to the review.

7.2 E U Employment Directive (2000/78/EC)

7.2.1 Discussion took place on the European Directive on Age Regulations which was due to come into operation on 1 October 2006 and it was agreed that this item be placed on the agenda for public authorities to indicate what steps were being taken to prepare for the introduction of this legislation.

7.3 Inter-generational Projects

7.3.1 David McConnell provided a brief outline of the following inter-generational projects taking place in England:-

- 'Magic Me' a London based organisation specialising in running arts projects bringing together young and older people and linking people from different cultures and contrasting backgrounds.
- Older people being introduced as 'Story Tellers' telling children stories from migrant communities;
- Older people coming together with primary school children aged between 6 and 7 for a range of activities facilitated by a classroom assistant.

He said that there were elements of these projects that could be used in Northern Ireland and said that if anyone was interested in these projects or in inter-generational practice more generally they could contact him at Age Concern.

7.4 NICEM – 5th Annual Human Rights and Equality Conference

7.4.1 Tansy informed members that NICEM would be holding its 5th Annual Human Rights and Equality Conference on Race Equality Strategy on the 6 December 2005.

7.5 NICIE – 'Faith Seminars'

7.5.1 Dean informed members that NICIE was organising a series of 'Faith Seminars' which would be open to the public. He undertook to provide further details at the next Forum meeting.

7.6 Staff Commission/Boards' Annual Equality Update

7.6.1 The Secretary reported that due to the Boards' current financial position the Staff Commission's/Boards Annual Equality Update detailing progress made in relation to

their Equality Schemes would be available on the Staff Commission's website at www.staffcom.org.uk. She confirmed that consultees would be notified of its availability.

8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1** Members noted that the Joint Consultative Forum was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 30 November 2005 at 2.00 p.m. in the Antrim Board Centre.