

MINUTES OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE STEERING GROUP OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2006 IN STAFF COMMISSION OFFICES

Present:-

Community & Voluntary Sector

Ms T Hutchinson	NICEM (Joint Chair)
Dr D McConnell	Age Concern
Ms K Tholkes	Age Concern
Ms S McKeating	Women's Support Network
Ms E Campbell	Youthnet
Mrs A Millar	NIPSA

Public Authorities

Mr J Curran	E&LBs (Joint Chair)
Ms D Vaugh	S C – (Secretary)
Ms C Stewart	Boards' Solicitors
Mrs M Sinnott	SEE&LB
Mrs P Murray	S C

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received on behalf of Mr D Guilfoyle, Ms A Perry, Mr T Heron, Mrs S Lawlor, Mr J Brown, Ms H Leith and Mr D Simpson.

2. Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting held on 19 October 2005

- 2.1 The minutes of the third meeting of the Steering Group were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising - Progress Report

Members considered the progress report which had been previously circulated and the following issues emerged:-

3.1 Review of School Crossing Patrols – LARSOA Guidelines

It was noted that the Boards had confirmed that the LARSOA Guidelines were being applied in all cases. It was emphasised that if there was to be any departure from the LARSOA Guidelines that separate consultation would be required by consultees.

3.2 Education Authorities' Five Year Reviews

Members noted that the Staff Commission had submitted its five year review to the Equality Commission on the 15 February 2006 and that the Boards would be submitting their reviews by the due dates

3.3 EAL Provision

Members noted the progress being made in relation to EAL provision. However, on a point of clarification Tansy said that the report did not accurately reflect that the meeting NICEM had had with the Department was not part of the consultation process. She expressed concern that the PriceWaterhouseCooper's report which would appear was being used to inform policy development had not yet been made available to NICEM and other groups. Tansy also indicated that it appeared from the progress report that the work to date was primarily carried out internally and said that it was important that external groups were also involved in the process of policy development.

Schools Bullying Policies

Members noted that Deirdre had written to the Department requesting that the Education Training and Inspectorate (ETI) provide a short presentation to the Forum on its pastoral care and monitoring role with regard to bullying in schools and that confirmation of receipt of the request had been received.

3.5 Revision of Religious Education (RE) Core Syllabus

Members noted that the Department had held a number of pre-consultation meetings with interested groups in relation the RE proposals.

Action: Deirdre to check with the Department who the groups were who had taken part in the pre-consultation meetings.

3.6 National Foundation for Education Research (NDER) at Queens – Public Consultation on Ways to Mainstream Equality in Schools in Northern Ireland

Members noted the information on the above public consultation. Deirdre said that representatives from the Boards/Staff Commission and CCMS would be attending the seminar organised for Statutory Education Providers and NDBPs.

3.7 Work-life Balance Review

It was noted that the results of the consultation exercise in relation to the Work-life Balance review had been issued in March 2005 and that an action plan was contained as Appendix 1 of the report which would have a beneficial effect in terms of the issues raised in relation to the nine equality categories.

John reported that a Guide to Work-life Balance policies compiled on a Staff Commission/inter-Board basis had been agreed at a recent meeting of the Joint Negotiating Council and said that the Guide, when printed, would be distributed to all non-teaching permanent staff. He also reported that the pilot exercise which was currently running in the Southern Board in relation to home based working was to be extended to an additional 14 staff in the maintenance section.

4. Public Private Partnerships Programme (PPP) (Presentation by Margaret Sinnott, South Eastern Board)

4.1 Deirdre explained that Margaret Sinnott from the South Eastern Board would speak to members on the South Eastern Board's P P P projects and that pre-screening consultation was due to commence on the following P P P Programmes:-

North Eastern Education & Library Board *(announced by the Minister in April 2004)*

Ballymoney High School, Ballymoney
Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt

South Eastern Education & Library Board *(announced by the Minister in 2002)*

Tor Bank Special School
Lagan College

Western Education & Library Board *(announced by the Minister in April 2004)*

Belmont House Special School, Londonderry
Devenish College, Enniskillen
Erne Special School, Enniskillen

Limegrove and Glasvey Special Schools, Limavady
Strabane Grammar School

Information on the North Eastern and Western Board projects were circulated to members for their information.

- 4.2** Margaret provided a brief overview of what Public Private Partnerships (PPP) were and then provided members with information on the South Eastern Board's PPP programme for Lagan College and Tor Bank Special School.

By way of background Margaret explained that Lagan College had been opened in 1981 and moved to its present site in 1987 with its first phase of permanent accommodation. Two further phases of permanent accommodation were completed but phases 4 and 5 were never completed. Tor Bank was opened in the 1960s as a special care school. The school has 132 pupils and the school site and accommodation are unsuitable. The site slopes making it difficult for pupils with mobility problems. Over 40% of the teaching space is temporary accommodation. There is no specialist science, art or music facilities. There is limited outdoor play space and frail pupils have to be moved around the site without the benefit of shelter from the elements.

In her presentation Margaret explained that:-

- A Ministerial announcement for the project had been made in 2002;
- The Capital Value of the project was 16.8 million;
- Lagan College was a Grant Maintained Integrated 11 – 18 school (the plan for Lagan College was for an extension and refurbishment including the replacement of all temporary accommodation);
- Tor Bank was a Controlled Special School for pupils aged 3 – 19 with severe learning difficulties (the plan for Tor Bank was for a new replacement school on the Dundonald High School site less than half a mile from the existing site);
- Consultation with stakeholders was now commencing;
- Entire scope of the project not yet determined (catering to be excluded; cleaning and caretaking subject to a value for money test);
- Bids to be received in August 2006;
- Award of contract Spring 2007;
- School opening 2008.

- 4.3** At this stage of the meeting the following concerns were raised:-

- the level of control in terms of after/out of school activities;
- the ability of the schools to respond to demographic changes i.e., increase of migrant workers/children in the local community;
- the quality of the building and whether, in the longer term, it would be 'fit for purpose';
- cost of build – annual re-payments over a 25 year period which have first call on the Public Authority's budget;
- timescale involved, PPP takes considerably longer from approval to project completion; and
- the possibility of a two tier workforce.

In response to the concern raised regarding the level of control in terms of after/out school activities Caroline said that each school would identify its required period of use and needs for the school day plus any additional periods it needed for out of school activities.

With regard to the design of the building Margaret confirmed that an Architect was part of the team and that tighter constraints were now in place.

4.4 Alison referred to the £16.5 million cost for this PPP project and said that she had attended a recent meeting at which the Minister had indicated that PPP projects with a value less than £20 - £25 million were not worthwhile.

4.5 Discussion took place on the equality implications of PPP projects and the need for these to be addressed at strategic level and it was concluded that at the next JCF meeting there would be merit in exploring this further with inputs being invited from the:-

- Department of Education
- Education and Library Boards
- CCMS
- Trade Unions
- Community and Voluntary Sector
- Equality Commission

4.6 Tansy thanked Margaret for her comprehensive presentation.

Action: PPP to be placed on the agenda for the next Joint Consultative Forum meeting. Inputs to be invited from the organisations listed above.

5. Resource Allocation Plans 2006/07

5.1 John referred to the Boards' Resource Allocation Plans (RAPs) for 2006/07 and explained that since the Belfast and South Eastern Boards were in a different position from the other three Boards it would be more difficult to envisage a co-ordinated approach to this year's RAPs. He said that the Belfast Board had to make cuts in the region of £4 million and the South Eastern Board had to make cuts in the region of £1.6 million. He said that it would be the Boards' intention to make a detailed presentation to the Forum but stressed that there would be particular sensitivities in relation to the Belfast and South Eastern Boards.

5.2 Discussion took place in which concern and frustration was expressed by members regarding the outcome of the screening process for the RAPs for 2005/06 and in particular the perceived lack of acknowledgement of equality impacts.

5.3 John said that he understood members' concerns however, he pointed out that Section 75 may not be the most appropriate method for dealing with this type of scenario. He said that Boards had recognised that there were adverse impacts but did not have the resources to mitigate and he emphasised the Boards' overriding legal obligation to stay within budget.

5.4 Members discussed the need for the draft priorities and budgets to be impact assessed at a strategic level and Deirdre reported that the Boards, in their responses to the draft

Priorities and Budgets, had emphasised that if cuts were made to the budgets there would be equality implications.

- 5.5** Discussion took place on the role of the Equality Commission and it was noted that it had made a written response to the Boards' RAPs for 2005/06. Consultees suggested that concerns raised regarding the equality implications and the lack of impact assessments at strategic policy level should be fed into the Equality Commission's review of Section 75. It was agreed that the Commission be invited to the Forum to discuss some of the difficulties organisations experience in implementing Section 75 at operational level.
- 5.6** Members emphasised the need for screening and consultation to take place on the RAPs for 2006/07 and expressed the preference that an inter-Board approach, if possible, be adopted to ensure consistency and make engagement in the process easier.
- 5.7** Members agreed to Deirdre's suggestion that the Quarterly Update which was sent to Forum members after each Steering Group meeting be held until after the Boards' Statutory Duty Co-ordinating Group meeting on the 8th March so that any further information on the RAPs could be included in the Update.

Action: Quarterly Update to be held until after the meeting on the 8th March.

6. Review of Public Administration

- 6.1** Deirdre reported that she had written to the Department of Education inviting a senior official to address the next meeting of the Forum on its vision for the future of education administration and the implications for the education sector. She said that the Department had confirmed receipt of her letter.
- 6.2** John indicated that the Department had written to the Chief Executives of the Boards/Staff Commission inviting volunteers with specific expertise to participate in the following project teams:-
- Procurement and Delivery for the Schools' Estate
 - Employing Authority
 - HR and Communications
 - Governance and Accountability
 - DE Internal Review
 - Youth Services
 - Review of Advice/Education Advisory Forum
 - Monitoring/Advice/Research
 - Legislation
- 6.3** Consultees highlighted the benefits of using the JCF as a mechanism to assist with the involvement/engagement of the community/voluntary sector in the process. They indicated that whilst equality needed to be mainstreamed into all these work themes, they would be keen to explore how the equality dimension would be addressed in the overall process and when screening/impact assessments would be concluded.

7. E U Employment Framework Directive (2000/78/EC)

7.1 Members noted that the Boards/Staff Commission had set up a Working Group consisting of Human Resource Professionals to review existing policies across the service to ensure that they comply with the new regulations due to be introduced in October 2006.

7.2 David reported that the Equality Commission had organised a conference for large employers on the age directive and highlighted that the age legislation was the biggest change since the fair employment legislation was introduced and he urged employers to have an in-depth look at their policies.

8. Transition (14+) Plan

8.1 Deirdre referred to the difficulties in relation to the Transition (14+) Plan which had been raised by MENCAP at the recent workshop. She said that the two Boards where there had been specific difficulties in relation to this policy had agreed to meet with MENCAP and that contact details for the Board Officers had been passed to MENCAP. Deirdre undertook to keep members informed of developments.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Conference

David referred to a recent Conference which he had attended in England and said that it was looking at a public duty in relation to age.

9.2 Youth Justice Agency Conference

David referred to a recent Conference for children and young people on the importance of agencies working together in relation to education and said that no-one from the Education and Library Boards had attended the conference.

9.3 Youth Summit – Race Equality Strategy

Tansy said that NICEM and the Runnymede Trust had been appointed by OFMDFM to undertake a project to support the implementation of the Racial Equality Strategy by running a scoping exercise on the six shared aims of the Strategy. She said that it was intended to organise a youth summit at the end of April 2006 to bring 100 young people (15 – 25) from full-time educational establishments together to discuss their priorities for Government in the context of this strategy. She said that the summit would be organised in close co-operation with the five Boards who would select and support the young people participating.

10. Date of Next Meeting

10.1 It was agreed that the officers would organise a date for the next meeting of the Forum.