

MEETING OF THE RPA STEERING GROUP HELD ON

FRIDAY 28 APRIL 2006 IN ROOM GD14, STORMONT CASTLE AT 10.30 am

Members: Nigel Hamilton
Sid McDowell (Chair, PSC)
David Gavaghan
Will Haire
Stephen Peover
Aideen McGinley
Alan Shannon
Gerry McGinn

Present: George Gray
Paul Simpson (for Andrew McCormick)
Rosalie Flanagan
Mary Bunting
Richard Pengelly (for Bruce Robinson)
Michael Daly (for John Hunter)
Noel Kelly
Jim McKeown
Debbie Donnelly

Apologies: John Hunter
Andrew McCormick
Bruce Robinson

1. Steering Group, etc – terms of reference

- 1.1 Nigel Hamilton introduced members welcoming in particular Sid McDowell as Chair of the Public Service Commission and David Gavaghan to whom the Group would look for guidance on managing this programme of change.
- 1.2 Terms of reference were agreed in relation to the Steering Group and the central coordinating unit in OFMDFM.
- 1.3 Mary Bunting outlined initial engagement with Departments to ensure mainstreaming of equality and good relations. Meetings had been held with the various Commissions, including the Public Service Commission, and with NIC/ICTU.

2. Public Service Commission (PSC)

- 2.1 Sid McDowell explained the role of the PSC. Relationships were critical to the Commission's ability to act strategically – the PSC would not act as a surrogate for employers or trade unions. The PSC was hoping to

promulgate initial recommendations in the next few weeks. These should not be overly prescriptive and, whilst arrangements for consulting on the content of the recommendations had not been established, it is envisaged that these might be both formal and informal in nature. Early engagement by Departments was encouraged – initial work could have wider application and be developed into useful models. Equality was an important dimension and the Commission was also taking stock of other legislation such as the regulations on informing and consulting with employees. Effective communications were seen as vital to addressing concerns of staff.

- 2.2 Michael Daly reported on the previous day's meeting with NIC/ICTU. It had been agreed to establish a forum which would address strategic issues and pass an agreed framework to the various sectors. A draft memorandum was being prepared and this would be shared with the PSC.
- 2.3 George Gray emphasised the need for clear legislative instructions on staffing issues and Nigel Hamilton underlined the importance of sharing these at an early stage with the PSC. The detail of obligations relating to staff was recognised as was the significance of communication and consultation.

3. Departmental arrangements

- 3.1 Outlines of progress in health, education and local government were given. These Departments (and others) had detailed project management arrangements in place and were keeping abreast of the timetable.
- 3.2 It was noted that the Local Government Boundaries Order had been debated at Westminster and was due to be made at Privy Council on 8 May. This Order established the number of councils at seven and enables the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. DHSSPS had advertised for a Chief Executive (Designate) for the Health and Social Services Authority and also for the Chairs of the 5 new Trusts. The appointment of a Chief Executive (Designate) at an early stage was seen as a key development for DE.
- 3.3 Departments had communication arrangements in place but recognised that more needed to be done. DHSSPS are planning a number of roadshows in May and June.

4. Cross-cutting issues

- 4.1 The list of cross-cutting issues was noted. DoE-led issues, especially community planning, involved core work to be shared with other Departments. The subgroup looking at the funding / financing of councils had met twice. On equality, the aim was to attempt to prepare high level impact assessments across a number of areas including employment, access to public services and participation in public life, etc.

5. Legislation programme

- 5.1 RPA implementation will require seven pieces of primary legislation, two of which will be “omnibus” Orders dealing with the transfer of functions to local government and public authorities (quangos). The two omnibus Orders will be coordinated by DoE and OFMDFM respectively.
- 5.2 George Gray advised that he had received initial instructions on Libraries from DCAL. He encouraged Departments to start with simple models and, so far as possible, confine issues in the omnibus Orders to RPA issues.
- 5.3 Papers mapping lead roles on functions transferring to local government, impact on quangos and areas to be addressed otherwise than by primary legislation were noted.

6 & 7. RPA timetable and key actions for 2 June meeting

- 6.1 The timetable set by Ministers at the 3 April Good Government meeting was noted. In order to meet the milestones in this timetable, the Steering Group will identify a series of key actions which must be achieved before each subsequent meeting. The actions listed for achievement by 2 June was agreed.
- 6.2 To ensure that the Steering Group can monitor progress, it was agreed that the central Unit will commission progress reports before each meeting from each relevant Department and the leaders of each of the cross-cutting issues. The central unit will meet with DFP to ensure that these reports align with information being collated for other purposes and also with David Gavaghan to ensure that this is an effective mechanism for the Group’s oversight role.

[Action – central unit, OFMDFM]

8. Dates of Next Meetings

Friday, 2 June 2006

Friday, 7 July 2006

and thereafter on the first Friday of every month.