

6. Paragraphs 24 & 26 – It was agreed to discuss the bilaterals held in relation to the 3rd and 5th Guiding Principles under the Cross Sector HR Update item on the agenda.
7. Paragraph 31 – Management Side advised that a meeting had been held with colleagues in DARD in relation to the concerns raised by Trade Union Side regarding the apparent lack of consideration being given to staff interests in the Rural Development Council (RDC). At the meeting it had been agreed that this was a matter for further discussion between the PSC and DARD given that it was unclear where the RDC sat in relation to RPA. Trade Union Side advised that a formal letter of notice of redundancies as a result of RPA had been received mid January from the Rural Development Council. Management Side outlined their understanding of the position in that there had been changes to funding but were not aware of any functions having transferred to justify RPA-related redundancies. Trade Union Side confirmed that it had been advised that the redundancies were due to the RPA and agreed to furnish Management Side with copies of all relevant correspondence on the issue.

Action: TUS

8. Trade Union Side referred Management Side to paragraph 6 of the minutes in relation to their concerns regarding the 2.5 year payback period for some senior positions in HPSS and sought information on progress. Management Side advised that some cases were currently being processed as possible voluntary early retirement cases which may include the consideration of suitable alternative employment as an alternative to voluntary redundancy where the 2.5 year payback refers. In addition, they reiterated that the 2.5 year payback period was constantly under review. Trade Union Side made the point clearly that certain staff may have an entitlement to redundancy on the basis that their jobs had disappeared and that it would not be possible to refuse to offer redundancy on the basis of some arbitrary cost factor. Trade Union Side advised that they would return to some of the problems involved when discussing the HPSS Staff Transfer Scheme and HR Framework document.

EQUALITY

9. Management Side advised that a separate meeting had been held with Trade Union Side which had afforded the opportunity to look at concerns previously expressed such as the need for an overarching EQIA and the sufficiency of equality considerations needed for e.g. recruitment processes in Health. Management Side noted the concern raised in relation to Health and advised that it had been agreed that a separate bilateral for Health would be arranged to allow proper consideration to be given to the issue raised.

Action: Management Side/TUS

10. Management Side further advised that they agreed that there needed to be a cross sectoral approach to equality, which would be promoted from the centre, but did not perceive that an overarching EQIA would be possible given the different timescales. Trade Union Side was informed that Departmental screening and EQIAs would be published on the RPA website.
11. In response, Trade Union Side expressed strong concerns regarding the lack of evidence of Government having a firm central control on equality, in particular in relation to Equality Impact and location. Whilst not minimising the scale of the task, Trade Union Side believed it to be unavoidable to the delivery of Section 75 obligations.
12. Management Side confirmed its view that a central EQIA was not practical given the range of location decisions to be taken. Furthermore, location decisions affecting Local Government would be taken by Local Government. Management Side advised that Local Government would be required to take into account earlier decisions by the other RPA affected sectors. They further advised that a database was being developed to allow those taking decisions to be aware of the context of prior decisions.
13. Trade Union Side stated that they remained strongly concerned that Management Side were not inclined to an overarching EQIA and asked for information on any preliminary work that had been done to influence that approach. Trade Union Side expressed its extreme concern at the overall approach to the equality dimension and advised that they would be seeking to raise the issue with the Equality Commission and perhaps the Minister.
14. Management Side agreed to look at the issues in the round and respond to them. Trade Union Side sought Management Side's written perspective in relation to an overarching EQIA.

Action: Management Side

IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

15. Management Side circulated an implementation update paper and informed of work being progressed on the revision to the Governance Arrangements, a clear declaration of the Vision Statement and a review of the cost and efficiencies expected from RPA.
16. In relation to legislation, it was advised that three of the Orders (Health, Libraries and Public Authorities (Reform)) are currently out for consultation and that the target dates for Education, Local Government (Structures) and Local Government (Functions) Orders remain challenging.

17. On other consultations, Management Side advised that a consultation paper prepared by the Estates Group on Guiding Principles for location decisions was available on the RPA website.
18. In respect of communications, it was advised that work is underway to refresh the communications strategy and enhance the public profile of the programme. In addition, the third staff communications bulletin was issued to staff on 21 February 2007.
19. Other key programme issues included:
 - 41 of 50 Directors appointed across the Health Trusts;
 - work continuing in Health with TUS on the statutory transfer scheme;
 - extensive stakeholder engagement continuing on Education policy issues; and,
 - new DOE Strategic Leadership Board meetings on 15 January and 5 February 2007.
20. A brief update was provided in respect of the NI Assembly. This included a report on RPA Implementation produced by the Programme for Government Committee of the NI Assembly on 23 January 2007. A copy of the report can be found on the Assembly website. However, the points to note include comments in relation to the number of councils, the number of NDPBs, political representation in relation to Education and Health bodies and co-terminosity.
21. In addition, Management Side advised that they would be meeting with the PSC in the coming week in relation to Managing Vacancies and the 4th Guiding Principle.
22. Trade Union Side queried the status of the RPA Capacity Building paper. Management Side agreed to issue a copy to them for comment.

Action: Management Side

CROSS SECTOR HR UPDATE

Guiding Principles

23. Management Side gave a brief oral update on the status of the Guiding Principles. They advised that a bilateral had been held last night during which respective positions were outlined regarding no compulsory redundancies and a single voluntary severance scheme.
24. It was agreed that another bilateral would be arranged to discuss the draft Code of Practice for the 3rd Guiding Principle.

Action: Management Side/TUS

Legislation

25. Management Side advised that they had received comments from Trade Union Side in relation to the draft Libraries and the draft Health Orders and that a meeting had been arranged shortly with Health to discuss the issues raised.
26. In relation to the 5th Guiding Principle, Trade Union Side outlined the need to progress to tangible mechanisms to give an assurance of no compulsory redundancies and a single voluntary severance scheme. They advised that they would participate further with the discussion at the bilateral in relation to the development of a safety net and principles and procedures to avoid compulsory redundancies. In addition, Trade Union Side reiterated the importance of the 5th Guiding Principle and the corresponding implications for the CSR.
27. Trade Union Side discussed the significance of their comments in relation to the draft Libraries Order which were based on Senior Counsel's advice and advised Management Side that it was extremely important that they are communicated with in relation to the signing of the Orders as well as the legislative provisions which have not been agreed with them given that this will be a model for all. Management Side noted the point.

Action: Management Side

28. In addition, Trade Union Side outlined that there have been various exchanges but no agreement on the HPSS HR Framework and the Staff Transfer Scheme. Trade Union Side expressed its strong concern that the situation in Health was becoming problematic especially in relation to the draft legislative provision on which it had received advice from senior counsel. In an effort to avoid confrontation and to progress the issues in Health in a constructive manner Trade Union Side proposed a meeting involving the Department, the Central RPA Unit and the CJF Trade Union Side and asked that representatives would make themselves available for this to take place urgently.
29. Management Side welcomed that way forward.

Action: Management Side/TUS

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

30. There were no issues raised.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

31. The next meeting was scheduled for 30 March at 11:30am.

[February 2007]