

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RPA CENTRAL JOINT FORUM

27 April 2007

Present: John McMillen (Chair) Patricia McKeown  
David Bingham Thomas Mahaffy  
Will Haire Brian Campfield  
Stephen Peover Albert Mills  
Cynthia Smith  
Damian Prince  
Michael Daly

Laura Armstrong (Minutes)

Apologies: John Hunter, Andrew McCormick, John Corey, Steve Tweed  
and Peter Bunting

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 30 MARCH**

1. The minutes of the meeting on 30 March were agreed subject to inclusion of the amendments proposed by Trade Union Side.

### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING ON 30 MARCH**

2. Paragraph 2 – Management Side reported that a draft minute of the emergency meeting of the Central Joint Forum on 7 March was currently being circulated to Management Side and that the draft would issue to Trade Union Side early next week.

#### **Action: Management Side**

3. Paragraph 4 – Trade Union Side advised that although the acuteness of the issue they had raised previously in relation to vacancy controls in the Education and Library Boards had since subsided, following direct representation to Boards concerns still remained about the misuse of vacancy controls to block the filling of posts that were clearly outwith the remit of the vacancy control policy.
4. Paragraph 5 – Trade Union Side requested an update in relation to the position of RDC. Management Side advised that meetings had been held between RDC and DARD on the future of the Council and the outcome is awaited.
5. Paragraph 13 – Management Side provided Trade Union Side with a brief written update in respect of the equality data collection exercise and talked through the salient points in the paper. Management Side outlined that phase two of the pilot database had been completed at the end of March and that concerns regarding data protection had been raised by a number of authorities. As a result, the Equality Directorate

was awaiting written confirmation from the Information Commissioner regarding the compliance of the database with data protection legislation. Management Side advised that the next phase of the work would be to formally commission the data. Trade Union Side queried the timescale for this work, Management Side outlined that it would be dependant on the turnaround by the Information Commissioner but that they would continue to press the issue.

6. Paragraph 15 – In relation to the issues raised by Trade Union Side concerning the Reorganisation and Shared Service conference, Management Side reported that there had been correspondence between the parties on the issue in which Management Side clarified that the fee for the event corresponded to the fact that the conference was a private sector organised event. Responding, Trade Union Side outlined that they should not have to pay to receive information which should be theirs of right and that the lack of Trade Union Side involvement in the event was unacceptable. Management Side noted the points made and agreed to provide Trade Union Side with copies of the slides and papers from the conference as well as a copy of the delegate list. Trade Union Side reiterated its concerns that the public sector was effectively subsidising these events and requested that this practice cease.

**Action: Management Side**

7. Paragraph 25 – Management Side advised that, on the evening of the last Central Joint Forum, Health held an urgent meeting with NIC ICTU and the Health Unions to discuss a number of urgent matters including the live appointment process for personal assistants and the planned reduction of 1700 jobs in Health. Management Side advised that following the discussions the recruitment has since taken place and there have been additional meetings with the Trade Unions to further work in relation to communications. Trade Union Side expressed its continuing concerns at the implementation of Health RPA.

**EQUALITY**

8. Management Side provided a brief update of the position in respect of equality. It was reported that departments have been asked to provide information in relation to Departmental EQIA's and screening and that these would be placed, as per agreement, on the RPA website. Trade Union Side advised that they have responded to the location consultation paper yet felt that the exercise was meaningless given the lack of a database to inform equality considerations. Management Side advised that the database was a key deliverable for the next phase of work on location. In order to inform the way forward for location, it was agreed that Management Side would organise a meeting with the Estates Sub Group, the Equality Directorate and Trade Union Side.

## **Action: Management Side**

9. Trade Union Side reiterated their concerns with regards the absence of an over-arching EQIA, in response, Management Side stated that they appreciated where the concerns originated yet outlined that the reasons why this could not be carried out had been discussed previously.
10. There was a discussion in relation to equality considerations in Health during which Management Side advised that in the coming week a presentation would be made to Staff Side on the issue. Additionally, Trade Union Side stated that they had asked at a separate Health meeting for a pause on the recruitment to 4<sup>th</sup> level posts in Health and had raised the issue at this forum given the potential for the exercise to be precedent setting. Management Side had explained that recruitment for 4<sup>th</sup> line positions in the new structures would be proceeding. It was accepted that there was a need to review whether the current approach to filling posts was the most appropriate below 4<sup>th</sup> line level. The review would be held jointly with the HSC Trade Unions.

## **IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE**

11. Management Side reported that given the uncertainties regarding the operational practicalities of Devolution, RPA implementation was progressing carefully and mindful of the need to fit RPA governance arrangements to those of incoming Ministerial roles.
12. In relation to legislation, Management Side considered the main issue to be the progression of the new Bills through the Assembly and the delay inherent in this. Trade Union Side referred Management Side to the deficiencies of the staff provisions in the legislation and to the discussions that have taken place in the Health context in this regard. In particular, Trade Union Side emphasised the implications of this for the legislative provisions in forthcoming legislation. In response, Management Side reported that Trade Union Side's comments were being considered but that no final decisions would be made before 8 May.
13. Management Side advised of the communications workshop held early April for the Voluntary and Community Sector as well as the workshop on the Shared Service Centres which took place late April.

## **CROSS SECTOR HR UPDATE**

14. Management Side reported that no final announcements would be made on outstanding PSC issues until after 8 May. The outstanding issues included the Code of Practice for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guiding Principle (Staff Transfers), the Government Response to the draft 5<sup>th</sup> Guiding Principle (Voluntary Severance) and the Government Response to the draft 7<sup>th</sup> Guiding Principle (Location).

15. Management Side advised that it was not anticipated that a reply to the draft 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Guiding Principles (Equality and Capacity Building respectively) would be issued until after 8 May. Trade Union Side agreed to share their response on the draft 8<sup>th</sup> Guiding Principle (Equality) with Management Side.

**Action: Trade Union Side**

16. In relation to Local Government, Management Side advised that post Devolution, early issues upon which resolution would be sought would be the number of councils and the functions transferring. Management Side re-emphasised the delay to the timetable should the original plans be altered.
17. In respect of Education, Management Side reported that work was ongoing in relation to legislation. Additionally, the senior structures and organisational issues for ESA were being looked at and it was anticipated that secondees from the Education Sector would be sought to facilitate this work. In addition, Management Side highlighted that whilst work was being taken forward in relation to ESA, the employing organisations also needed to take forward their staffing responsibilities and that monthly meetings have been set up to ensure that this happens.
18. Management Side gave a brief update of the developments in Health, in particular it was reported that the first sweep of director level appointments had been completed and that almost all posts had been filled. Furthermore, it was reported that work was ongoing in relation to recruitment to third line posts and of the approach required for this in line with the PSC's Guiding Principle. Trade Union Side advised that this highlighted a communication issue in relation to the RPA Affected Group concept. Management Side agreed and reported that meetings had been held to try and overcome the issue.
19. In addition, Management Side reported that work was progressing in relation to voluntary early retirement in Health. Trade Union Side stated that there was an issue over the timing of inviting to express an interest in voluntary redundancy and that given the numbers involved it would be best if individuals were invited to express an interest before the structures were filled. Management Side said that this issue would be looked at during the review referred to earlier.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

20. Trade Union Side queried the impact of Devolution on the composition of the RPA team. Management Side reported that it was not envisaged that there would be any changes at official level but that there was a need for clarity over the coming weeks on the political arrangements.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

21. The next meeting was scheduled for 25 May at 11:30am

**[April 2007]**