

MINUTES

RPA Steering Group Meeting – 2 February 2007

Members: John Hunter
Stephen Peover
Sid McDowell
Bruce Robinson
Gerry McGinn
Aideen McGinley

Present: George Gray
Cynthia Smith
Colm Shannon
Rosalie Flanagan
Brian Doherty
Chris Stewart (for Will Haire)
Denis McMahon (for Andrew McCormick)
Barney McGahan (for Alan Shannon)
Michael Donnelly (for David Gavaghan)
John McMillen
Damian Prince
Eamonn McConville

Apologies: Nigel Hamilton
Will Haire
Andrew McCormick
Alan Shannon
David Gavaghan

1. Welcome

1.1 John Hunter welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that he would be chairing the meeting for Nigel Hamilton.

2. Minutes of 1 December 2006

2.1 Minutes of the 1 December 2006 meeting were accepted.

3. Assembly Matters

3.1 John Hunter referred to the conclusions in the Programme for Government Sub Group report and explained that a response would be required from the Secretary of State. A holding reply had already issued.

3.2 It was noted that the main conclusion related to the potential desire for further reductions in number of quangos; the issue of RPA costs and efficiencies; the number of councils; and the need for further engagement on Health and Education.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Bruce Robinson reported that progress was being made on the Shared Services work. He expected that an outline programme, terms of reference and detail on who will be involved would be available at the next meeting.

4.2 John McMillen agreed to take action DEC. 2 under agenda item 4.

4.3 Bruce Robinson reported that the costs and efficiencies work for business cases was significantly progressed and should be complete by 31 March. A dedicated resource had been identified and would begin work on methodologies on Monday. In response to a question Bruce explained that when information was available, DFP staff would speak to departments with the intention of getting everyone to the same point in business case development.

4.4 Cynthia Smith reported that mechanisms had been agreed to ensure that equality stakeholders were engaged in the consultation process on PSC Guiding Principles.

4.5 George Gray and Colm Shannon agreed to take actions DEC. 5 and DEC. 6 under agenda items 6 & 7 respectively.

5. Programme Management

5.1 Oral Reports

5.1.1 Denis McMahon thanked George Gray and his team for their help in getting the Health Order out to consultation. The closing date was 11 April.

5.1.2 Transfer Orders had been prepared in relation to the Trusts, taking on the advice from Trade Unions and PSC. Health was currently working with Trade Unions on a statutory transfer scheme.

5.1.3 41 of the 50 director posts had been appointed across the Trusts.

5.1.4 A joint committee had been established to ensure a smooth development of the commissioning side.

5.1.5 The process of appointing Trust non executive directors was to be televised.

5.1.6 Health would be keeping a close eye on efficiencies as the figures were refined.

- 5.1.7 John Hunter remarked that that the Health transfer scheme could be used as a model.
- 5.1.8 Denis McMahon explained that Health was working closely with Trade Unions and that the transfer scheme would take precedence over the HR framework.
- 5.1.9 Chris Stewart reported that things were being progressed in parallel within DE but that difficulties were being encountered. The extensive policy agenda and associated stakeholder engagement was due to conclude at the end of February. The DE programme board would then decide if an EQIA was required.
- 5.1.10 Work was continuing at the same time on legislation and this was also due to complete by end of February, however, there may be some change to that depending on circumstances.
- 5.1.11 Chris reported that there was a significant risk that the DE implementation timeframe would not be met. George Gray confirmed that in the event of devolution returning this would very likely be the case.
- 5.1.12 Stephen Peover reported that final instructions would be with OLR by end of February. He explained that like DE, DOE were progressing issues in parallel and that the timetable for implementation would be in jeopardy in the event of a return to devolution.
- 5.1.13 The Strategic Panel had met on 15 January to discuss terms of reference, operating arrangements and funding for the implementation structures. The panel would meet again on Monday 5 February. In the event that a local minister wants to revisit these structures, the terms of reference would be transferable.

5.2 Programme Management Arrangements

- 5.2.1 John McMillen referred to the actions within the Gateway Review paper, which had been agreed with HOCS and the minister. The group took each cluster of recommendations sequentially:
- 5.2.2 Response to recommendation 1 was noted.
- 5.2.3 Response to recommendations 2, 3 & 7 (vision) was agreed. There would need to be some alteration to the wording in relation to the Education sector.
- 5.2.4 Response to recommendation 4 (capacity building) was agreed. Aideen McGinley added that there should be strong involvement from CAL and that Bruce Robinson had commissioned a paper from Steve Hare along these lines.
- 5.2.5 Response to recommendations 5 & 6 (business cases) was agreed.

- 5.2.6 Damian Prince explained the response to recommendation 8, which did not seek to bring expertise into the central team but rather kept that expertise on the front line and strengthened the communication channels in a virtual team environment.
- 5.2.7 The principle behind recommendations 10, 11 & 12, dissolving the current Steering Group and establishing a new programme board were agreed. However, a number of issues were raised in discussion including:
- the role of the SRO versus Permanent Secretaries' Accounting Officer role;
 - avoidance of replicating PSG;
 - clarification of which departments should sit on the programme board;
 - the need to consider how local government will be involved;
 - remove the sentence "key day to day decision making body";
 - whether the Review of Public Administration was a programme or simply a collection of individual projects and programmes
- 5.2.8 It was agreed that responses to the memorandum of understanding would be collated and a paper presented to PSG on 2 March, which would determine the new RPA programme governance arrangements.

6. HR Issues

6.1 Public Service Commission

- 6.1.1 Sid McDowell provided an update on work being undertaken by PSC. The 4th guiding principle had been promulgated that morning. PSC were waiting for a response to the addendum to the 3rd guiding principle.
- 6.1.2 Sid reported that a meeting had been held with Paul Sweeney regarding the DCAL competition and that Paul had agreed revisit the equality considerations and respond to PSC.
- 6.1.3 Discussions were on going within PSC in relation to the power of direction and operations during shadow council period.
- 6.1.4 John McMillen remarked that a large amount of work had been done with PSC and whilst this had been challenging at times, it had been undertaken in a business like manner and he thanked Sid for this. He raised the issues of the function of the local government staff commission.
- 6.1.5 Stephen Peover explained that a paper had been sent to the minister with options to either continue the existing arrangements for a longer period or to flag up the need for a wider staff commission. There would be a clearer view after the elections.

6.1.6 John McMillen explained that PSC had pointed up the need for monitoring adherence to the guiding principles and that work was being done to develop appropriate mechanisms.

6.2 Central Forums

6.2.1 John Hunter reported that Trade Unions remain exercised over a single voluntary redundancy scheme and compulsory redundancies. Discussions are following the same lines as with PSC. Trade Unions also have concerns that the guiding principles are not being followed through robustly.

6.2.2 Trade Unions have expressed their interest in consultation documents, especially locations. Their comments will be treated as part of the general consultation.

6.2.3 Denis McMahon reported that the recent meeting with health unions was very positive and included discussions 3rd level appointments. They will also be consulting on 3rd level structures within the trusts.

7. Cross Cutting Issues

7.1 Legislation

7.1.1 George Gray reported that 3 Orders had been published namely, Libraries, Public Authorities Reform and Health. The publishing of Health Order was a major step forward and a major achievement by all involved. There may be a need to make some small adjustments but it was in good shape for meeting Health Reform.

7.1.2 Progress in local government was slow, which was a reflection on the enormity and complexity of these Orders. About 50% had been delivered with issues such as governance and performance management remaining to be done.

7.1.3 Roads were progressing well considering there was a lot of Roads legislation. There were issues over the role of councils versus DOE. Fire Services legislation defers authority to councils. Housing had about 50% of instructions delivered. Planning was progressing well. There had been little contact from DSD recently.

7.1.4 In response to a question, George remarked that the final number of councils was the big issue. In order to meet the April 2008 deadline, the legislation needs to be laid by December 07.

7.2 Equality

7.2.1 Cynthia Smith reported that Trade Unions had asked about central coordination of the cross cutting themes. In response, she had presented a paper to the Central Joint Forum and had further discussions with Trade Unions. There will be further discussions at the 16 February meeting.

- 7.2.2 Cynthia explained that EQIAs would be carried out on an iterative basis. Equality directorate would provide advice and support to departments and in addition, a substantial exercise was underway to prepare a database. The directorate was also setting up a database for all EQIAs, which would be available to all departments as a central resource.

8. Communications

- 8.1 Colm Shannon reported that the issue of language and length of circulars had been discussed and taken account of in the latest circular to issue.
- 8.2 Colm explained that the communications policy would be reviewed in light of the work being done on the RPA vision. He highlighted that the communications table was not as extensive as before due mainly to the Purdah period. However, this would be reviewed after the elections.
- 8.3 At the recent local government seminar Colm had discussed the issue of managing internal communications with a number of delegates and as a result the EIS best practice seminar will be made available to other sectors.
- 8.4 John McMillen informed the group that the recent omnibus survey had revealed that 74% of respondents had not heard of RPA. This would be taken into account in the review of the communications policy.

9. Next Meeting

- 9.1 As this was the last meeting of the Steering Group in its current format, no further dates were arranged. RPA governance issues will be taken at the 2 March PSG meeting.