

public **service** commission

and



**Review of the Effectiveness of Communication  
in relation to the  
Implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA);  
The Views, Attitudes and Experiences of Health and Social Care Staff  
Affected by the RPA; and  
Other Associated Issues**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**September 2008**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1 BACKGROUND TO THIS REVIEW

#### 1.1 Background to the Review of Public Administration

*“The Review of Public Administration (RPA) will introduce the most far-reaching reform of the system of public administration in Northern Ireland for a generation”<sup>1</sup>.*

The scale and pace of the change across so many parts of the public administration system is unprecedented in Northern Ireland.

Launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2002, the RPA was taken forward initially by direct rule ministers because of the suspension of devolution. With the return of the NI Assembly in May 2007, local ministers assumed responsibility for the RPA.

#### 1.2 Context of the RPA Change Process

Within the health sector, the scale, complexity and speed of the changes alone represented an immense change management challenge. The fact that a number of major changes and initiatives were also operating in parallel with the RPA change process, presented further challenges to both those leading the change process and those affected by it.

Throughout this report, we refer to a number of changes / initiatives which were concurrent with and had an impact on the implementation of the RPA in the health and social care sector. These are:

- The return to a devolved administration;
- The Human Resources Framework (HR Framework)<sup>2</sup> and the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of it;
- The implementation of Agenda for Change (AFC);
- Staff Transfer Scheme<sup>3</sup>;
- The introduction of competency based interviewing;
- The new Programme for Government (PFG), associated budget and Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR);
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA);
- Modernisation Agenda;
- Shared Services; and,
- Priorities for Action (PFA).

The key features of each of these along with a summary of the issues they raise in the context of this review of the views, attitudes and experiences of Health and Social Care staff affected by the RPA change process are set out in Appendix 1.

The key points are that the RPA change process was operating at a time when:

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<sup>1</sup> Source : “Better Government for Northern Ireland, Final Decisions of the Review of Public Administration, March 2006 - [http://www.rpani.gov.uk/pdf\\_rpa\\_21\\_march\\_doc.pdf](http://www.rpani.gov.uk/pdf_rpa_21_march_doc.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> We are informed that this document was not agreed with the Trade Union Side

<sup>3</sup> We are informed that that it was agreed that the Staff Transfer Scheme would be revisited post RPA CJF agreement on the Staff Transfer Scheme Code of Practice.

- **An implementation plan for the RPA change process had already been devised but was later changed** – The original plan had been prepared under direct rule Ministers but with the return of the NI Assembly there was a delay of several months while the new Health Minister considered the suitability of the plans. Whilst a review of the plans was considered to be necessary:
  - The time taken created a vacuum which appears to have heightened uncertainty amongst staff and created challenges for those leading the change process in terms of providing meaningful information about the potential impact of the change process to staff during this period; and,
  - The changes to the plans also meant that some staff who initially thought they would not be affected by RPA discovered later that they would. Again, this added to the feeling of uncertainty amongst staff.
- **‘Agenda For Change’ was not complete** - Described as “the most radical shake up of the NHS pay system since the NHS began in 1948” This UK-wide initiative involved “matching jobs to national profiles, or evaluating jobs locally, ... to determine in which pay band a post should sit”<sup>4</sup>. The fact that AFC was not complete meant that some staff did not know which pay band their current post was in and hence they were not sure if they would or would not be better off financially by applying for some of the posts that arose under RPA restructuring.
- **The Comprehensive Spending Review was placing a downward pressure on costs during a time of major change** – This was happening at a time when resources were already under pressure.
- **Priorities for Action and the Performance Management System were placing an upward pressure on results / outcomes during a time of major change** – **This upward pressure on results / outcome coincided with** the already considerable challenge of service continuity. Indeed, the literature would suggest that an initial dip in performance is likely to be the more typical experience of many organisations in the early stages of a major change process as time and energy focuses internally on the change process itself, sometimes to the detriment of service delivery.

*The combination of these factors alone creates a highly complex and demanding environment in which to both manage change and sustain communications with staff.*

### **1.3 The Effect of Major Organisational Change**

In appraising the findings from this research project, the organisational context cannot be ignored and especially the extent of change experienced by the health, social services and personal safety ‘family’ over recent years. As to how staff respond to change, the available literature is unequivocal in demonstrating the short-term, negative response that can be anticipated. Indeed, those charged with managing the change process in any organisation should automatically assume that negative attitudes will reflect on varying degrees of resistance, and in particular among those who may have a longstanding commitment to the existing

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<sup>4</sup> Source : <http://www.nhsemployers.org/pay-conditions/agenda-for-change.cfm>

organisation, and who may perceive that their role may be threatened or devalued in the new order.

When surveying staff during a time of change, and especially where the future may appear uncertain for those removed from decision-making, it is accepted that attitude measures will inevitably track discontent. As one example, the recent National NHS Survey (2007), carried out by the Healthcare Commission in England and Wales ([http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk/\\_db/\\_documents/National\\_NHS\\_staff\\_survey\\_2007\\_summary\\_of\\_key\\_findings\\_200804183620.pdf](http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk/_db/_documents/National_NHS_staff_survey_2007_summary_of_key_findings_200804183620.pdf)), revealed that a significant majority of NHS staff felt dissatisfied primarily with three issues - 'involvement, communications and being valued'. (p. 3)

While this response to organisational change is predictable, the literature is also clear in highlighting steps that can be taken to facilitate staff adjustment. These steps can be summarised in terms of three overriding principles – consistency, transparency and fairness. The extent to which management can ever succeed in allaying all concerns and anxieties through adherence to these principles is debatable but is an aspiration worth pursuing.

It is also inevitably the case that successive surveys will tend to reveal how effective change management succeeds in restoring staff morale beyond the immediate, short-term disruption. This 'one-off' survey is unable to track evidence of attitude change but a follow-up survey after a suitable period of time would yield interesting data in this regard.

## 2 SUMMARY OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

The overall aim of this review was “*to assess how RPA implementation has been perceived by staff [within the health and social care sector], to examine levels of communication about the RPA and to assess staff’s understanding of the PSC and their guiding principles*”.

*(Full terms of reference are set out in Sections 1.2 and 1.3 of the main report).*

It is important to appreciate that this review centred **on the perceptions of staff and their experience of the change process** as distinct from a critique of the actual processes of change.

Consequently, whilst we collected data on the nature and extent of communication (to provide context), the **major focus** of our research was on gathering information on the **perceptions of staff** via the survey and focus groups. (See summary of methodology below).

## 3 SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

We invited all five Trusts, all four health boards, DHSS&PS, the Central Services Agency and the Health Promotion Agency to complete an e-based questionnaire to provide us with high-level information on the nature and extent of communication about the RPA in their respective organisations since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006. Two out of the

five Trusts responded and five of the eight other health service organisations responded.

### 3.2 SURVEY

To quantify staff perception of the change process, a survey was conducted among RPA affected staff in health Trusts, health Boards, DHSSPS and other health service agencies affected by RPA. The survey was targeted at Tiers 1 to 5 within these organisations. With the support of the HR departments within each of the organisations, a total of 2821 staff were mailed a questionnaire pack and a follow-up reminder.

Following the distribution of the questionnaire to 2821 staff, a total of 700 questionnaires were completed and returned. This represents a response rate of 25%. Based on a sample size of 700 cases, the margin of error for all survey estimates is at most + / - 4% at the 95% Confidence Level. Given that the achieved sample broadly reflects the known staff profile by organisation, and the sample size, the findings have a sufficient degree of statistical validity.

### 3.3 FOCUS GROUPS

To complement the quantitative survey, the project team conducted qualitative research in the form of 13 focus groups<sup>5</sup> as follows:

| <b>Focus Group with...</b>                              | <b>Number of Focus Groups</b> | <b>Number of Participants</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Trust Employees (Tiers 1 – 4)                           | 10                            | 62                            |
| Departmental Staff (Tiers 1 – 4)                        | 1                             | 8                             |
| Staff who took Voluntary Early Retirement (Tiers 1 – 4) | 1                             | 6                             |
| Trade Union Representatives                             | 1                             | 8                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>13</b>                     | <b>84</b>                     |

These focus groups took place between mid-April and June / July 2008. A summary of the characteristics of the participants is set out in Appendix 5. Where the sample sizes were large (e.g. in the case of the focus groups with Trust staff and the focus group with Departmental staff), individuals were selected using a randomisation process. Where the sample was restricted (i.e. in the case of the focus group with Trade Union representatives) we defined specific criteria that participants had to meet. Where the sample size was very small – less than 10 - (i.e. in the case of staff who took voluntary early retirement), we invited all those in Tiers 1 – 4 who were willing to attend the focus group.

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<sup>5</sup> Despite repeated attempts and a variety of approaches, it proved impossible to secure sufficient attendance at three other focus groups which we had hoped to conduct as part of the research. These were focus groups with:

- Health Boards / Agencies (Two focus groups were scheduled); and,
- Key Human Resources Staff.

### 3.4 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to remember that the results of the survey and the views expressed in the focus groups represent **perceptions** of aspects of the change process as conveyed by participating staff. These perceptions will have been influenced by the fact that they had undergone or were about to embark on a radical change in mechanisms and structures on a scale that has not been experienced within the public sector in recent years. As indicated above, the impact of the RPA changes was compounded by the convergence of a number of other ongoing change initiatives, not least the Agenda for Change process and the introduction of a new performance management regime.

It should also be recognised that whilst change has happened, health services continue to be provided and we are advised that stringent and challenging processes are in place to ensure that quality and performance comply with the standards specified. The essence of the messages contained in this report and the spirit in which they were conveyed are, therefore, not designed to criticise those who were in the vanguard of the RPA change process, but to **inform those organisations that are yet to complete or embark on the journey in order that they might learn from the experiences of others.**

## 4 KEY FINDINGS

### 4.1 COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

Based on the information provided to us, it is clear that there were extensive efforts made by the Minister and by senior health and social care staff to communicate with staff:

- in the Trusts and within the RPA Phase 2 Bodies; and,
- both before and after the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007.

The significant level of time and resources invested and the diversity of methods deployed strongly suggest that there was a genuine motivation to ensure effective communication. We note, however, that only a small number of the respondents indicated that they had conducted (or were about to conduct) a review of the *efficacy* of communication as an explicit and integral part of the change process. Given the findings of the survey and the feedback from the focus groups with Trust staff in relation to the low levels of satisfaction with how the change process was communicated with staff, it may be worth considering building in a specific review of the effectiveness of communication at a specific interval(s) during future change processes.

### 4.2 COMPARISON OF SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

In most areas, the views expressed in the focus groups echoed and amplified the survey results. The table summarises the main points to emerge from each.

## COMMUNICATION

### Provision of information and satisfaction – Ref 1

- The staff survey found that the overwhelming majority (88%) of staff had been provided with information when the change process was introduced.
- However, in terms of satisfaction with how the change process was perceived to be communicated to staff:
  - Just over one fifth (22%) said they were satisfied with how the change process was communicated to them (1% 'very satisfied' and 21% 'satisfied');
  - Almost one third (32%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
  - Nearly half (45%) were dissatisfied (28% 'dissatisfied' and 17% 'very dissatisfied');
  - 2% of staff recorded 'don't know' in response to this question.
- Focus group participants perceived that a considerable quantity of information had been provided. However, (see below) many considered that it was unable to answer their most important question, i.e. "What do the changes mean for me?"

### Quality of information provision - Various Sources – Ref 2

- The majority of survey respondents recorded relatively higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of the information provided by Directors (60%), line managers (59%) and Chief Officers (54%), and relatively lower levels of satisfaction for information provided by DHSSPSNI (38%), senior managers (40%) and Trade Unions (43%).
- Focus group participants (Trust staff) perceived that the most effective sources of information came from face to face contact and team meetings. Email was considered to be useful for disseminating information but not for 'dialogue'.

### Usefulness of Information Received - Various Sources – Ref 3

- However, when asked to comment on the usefulness of information provided by the various sources, the majority of staff, irrespective of the source of the information, found it useful (e.g. Directors, 83%; Trade Unions, 81%; RPA Central Unit, 79% etc).
- This issue was explored in more depth in the focus groups. Participants welcomed and were appreciative of the efforts of the various tiers of management to communicate aspects of the change process. However, they perceived that the information conveyed in those communications often lacked the detail they were seeking i.e. the implications of change for them as individuals.
- Senior staff within the focus groups expressed frustration at not being in a position to provide these specifics as they perceived this had given rise to a suspicion amongst some that they were holding back some of the important detail.

### Mode of Communication – Ref 4

- Specifically with regard to the mode of communicating information associated with the change process, staff were more likely to rate the communication mechanisms used *within* their respective organisations as being effective (e.g. face-to-face briefings, 76%; staff briefings and team meetings, 75%), compared with external modes of communication such as seminars (45%), conferences (46%) and websites (54%).
- As in the survey, participants thought that face to face communication was most effective; email and websites were only useful in conveying information of a more general nature and were only effective when it was confirmed that all the target audience had access to computers.
- The lack of integration of some IT systems appears to have delayed and complicated sharing of information by email for some. With hindsight, it seems it would have been highly beneficial to have had key IT systems harmonised in advance.
- To obtain the information they were seeking, participants generally thought it would be most helpful if they were given a clear point of contact, i.e. someone who was well informed and equipped to provide the answers. To that end, it was felt that it would be helpful to have had a dedicated unit of such staff, based, preferably, in the Human Resources (HR) department of the organisation concerned.

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants also highlighted the need for guidelines on cascading information since they perceived this was not done consistently.</li> <li>• There was also thought to be a need for greater awareness of the challenges facing staff (at lower grades) whose literacy skills (and hence capacity to assimilate written information) was limited. To reduce the risk of marginalisation during a major change process, a specific emphasis on verbal updates for this group of staff was thought to be needed.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Trying to Accessing Information Directly – Ref 5</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to being provided with information on the change process resulting from RPA, almost seven out of ten (68%) staff had tried to access information for themselves albeit with limited effectiveness.</li> <li>• For example, among staff who had tried to access further information from HR staff, just 33% had been effective in doing so, with attempts to get further information from DHSSPSNI effective in under one third (31%) of cases.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group participants indicated that they had tried to access information for themselves from a range of sources including web sites, professional bodies etc. For many, even such sources were unable to answer their fundamental question, “What do the changes mean for me?” Some indicated that they had received ‘replies’ from HR but that the information given was not adequate to address their query or, in some cases, information/advice changed at a later date.</li> </ul>                                 |
| <b>Experience of Barriers to Accessing Information – Ref 6</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost half of all staff in the survey (47%) said that they had experienced barriers in getting information on the change process. The key barriers related to identifying people who were clear about what was happening under the change process and who could provide clear and consistent answers to specific questions.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus group participants re-iterated similar types of barriers in terms of getting information.</li> </ul>  |

## IMPACT OF CHANGE ON STAFF

| <b>Receipt of letters re transfer to new Trust - - Ref 7</b>   |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>91% of the staff reported that they received the letters regarding their transfer to the new Trust</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All of the focus group participants indicated that they had received the letters.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The vast majority of staff in the survey rated the value of the letter as positively – (46% ‘good or excellent’ and 42% as ‘fair’)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The general perception amongst the focus group participants was that these letters were merely a formality – something the organisation ‘had to do’. Most attached no real significance to them.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Location of Job Affected by Change Process - - Ref 8</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a result of the change process brought about by RPA, approximately one in four staff (24%) had either had to change job location, or will be changing job location in the future. To date, Trust staff (34%) was more likely to have had to change job location compared with staff currently working in Boards (14%) and other organisations (8%).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus group participants described a number of challenges both for staff and for management. Some of these related to their feelings of uncertainty about their future job security. A number of Trust staff reported that they had experienced the combined challenges of a change of team / colleagues, change of location and increased workloads. The latter was due, in some cases, to the policy around vacancy controls and in others to delays in filling posts. The participants perceived that the combination of the above factors had, in some instances, increased stress levels among staff which they claimed had adverse implications for the quality of their work and family lives and could, they believed if sustained, could, in the long term adversely affect their health.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Awareness of Pension Entitlement – Ref 9</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In terms of job terms and conditions, 75% of staff were aware that pension rights transfer with staff, with 82% aware that their job terms and conditions are protected during the change process.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the main, focus group participants were already aware or had assumed their pension rights transferred.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was a lower level of awareness (62%) regarding the protection offered under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings).</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the main, focus group participants either already knew or had assumed TUPE applied.</li> </ul>   |

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

| Overall – Ref 10   |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although 15% of staff described their overall experience of the change process as positive, for the majority of staff (70%) the experience as been negative, with lack of planning and poor communication the most common reasons for this assessment. Also when asked how satisfied staff were with how the change process had been communicated to them, just 22% were satisfied, with 45% dissatisfied, and 32% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This perception is echoed in the focus groups. See comments in Reference 1 above.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At an overall level, over two-thirds of the respondents (70%) perceived that the process had not been well managed. Just one-fifth (20%) were of the view that it had been well managed.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was a perception amongst many focus group participants that the process had not been well managed, with frequent references to a plan that to them seemed to ‘evolve’ rather than have been planned clearly from the outset.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respondents perceived that more open communication at the time of the change, and better organisation and planning, would have improved the implementation process.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having been through the change process, many participants now appreciated the unprecedented magnitude and complexity of it and perceived, with hindsight, that the process could have been better managed.</li> <li>Alongside these comments, a number of very positive views were expressed by focus group participants. In the main these related to what they perceived as the sterling efforts of HR departments who had to cope with change at a number of different levels, including the implementation of the Agenda for Change process, the advertising and filling of new posts and managing ongoing day to day HR issues. Participants in the focus groups perceived that this underpinned the need to ensure that HR departments were properly resourced to cope with all the facets of change in advance of the process getting underway.</li> </ul> |

**Level of change – Ref 11**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In implementing the change process, most staff (80%) perceived that there were too many changes going on within the health and social care sector at the time of RPA, with almost three out of four staff (74%) saying that recent months have seen their organisation over-stretched as a result of trying to implement the change process.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The focus group participants (Trust staff) shared these views.</li><li>• There were repeated references to feeling overwhelmed by a range on coinciding change initiatives, such as Agenda for Change and performance management.</li><li>• Many participants referred to the change process as ‘continuing’ with new structures and new cultures taking a long time to bed in. As a consequence, people and organisations were over – stretched with people often straddling two jobs and, in some cases, part of an administrative role (because administrative staff had not yet been appointed).</li></ul> |
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**Concern about job security – Ref 12**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For the majority of staff (51%), the change process led to concerns that they may lose their job.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These perceptions are consistent with the feedback from the focus group participants. (Trust staff).</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More than 1 on 10 (14%) staff indicated that they were “afraid to discuss with my line manager issues that affected me regarding the RPA for fear it would affect my career”.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This survey finding was echoed in feedback from the focus groups with Trust staff. The fear of losing their job or being compromised in their future career appears to have been a factor in some individuals not bringing the emotional and / or operational challenges they were facing to the attention of their line manager or director. They were concerned that this could be interpreted as their being ‘unable to cope’ and that such an interpretation could adversely affect their chances for a future post.</li></ul> |

### Perceptions of being treated equitably – Ref 13

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a perception among a significant number of staff (45%) that the appointment processes had favoured individuals from particular organisations.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This perception also emerged in the focus groups with Trust Staff across all of the new Trusts</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than one in five staff (22%) perceived that they were treated unfairly during the change process.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were repeated references in the focus groups with Trust staff to aspects of the recruitment and selection processes, redundancy / voluntary early retirement, relocation and job security which they perceived as inconsistent, not transparent and unfair.</li> </ul> |

### Preparing for Change – Ref 14

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost half (47%) of staff believed that they could have been better supported and prepared for the changes which were introduced.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many focus group participants indicated that they had not experienced a change of this scale, complexity or pace before and perceived themselves, with hindsight, to have been unprepared for the magnitude of the changes and the attendant impact on them.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most staff (52%) were critical of not being provided with enough information on how the change process would or will affect them and of not being provided with clear guidance on the new structures that would be in place following RPA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were also perceptions amongst some that whilst the Career Directions workshops were available, it was 'too little, too late' in the context of the magnitude and pace of the change.</li> </ul>   |

### Job Opportunities – Ref 15

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In relation to job opportunities associated with the change process just over a quarter (28%) of staff said that they had been made aware of all the job opportunities for which they were eligible, with 42% holding the opposite view.</li> <li>• In contrast however, just 9% of staff said that they had been told that they were unable to apply for certain jobs that they later learned they should have been allowed to apply for.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As indicated above, there were repeated references in the focus groups with Trust staff to aspects of the recruitment and selection processes, redundancy / voluntary early retirement, relocation and job security which they perceived as inconsistent, not transparent and unfair.</li> </ul> |
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### Competency-based interviewing – Ref 16

- Whilst 10% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Panel members carrying out the new competency-based interviews were adequately trained and experienced”, almost twice this number (18%) disagreed.
- Similarly, whilst 10% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Employees undertaking the new competency-based interviews were adequately trained and experienced”, over three times this number (33%) disagreed.
- The introduction of competence based interviewing was new to the health sector and was perceived by many of the focus group participants as only serving to compound the already considerable difficulties faced by staff in accessing new posts. Focus group participants also perceived that there were inadequacies in the training given to and the experience of both panel members conducting and employees undertaking the new competency-based interviews.

### Clarity on new structures and roles – Ref 17

- At the time of the survey, close to half (44%) of staff indicated that they were not clear on what the new structures were and where their current job fitted within these new structures.
- This sense of disorientation was echoed in the focus groups with Trust staff.
- Some were concerned about not being able to identify who was responsible for key organisational responsibilities such as clinical governance and risk management.
- Participants referred to a lack of planning for the change process. They perceived that the plan ‘evolved’ as change progressed.

## AWARENESS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

| <b>Public Service Commission &amp; Principles – Ref 18</b>   |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, 39% of staff said that they had heard of the Public Service Commission, with higher levels of awareness reported by older staff (aged 50+) and those in senior management positions. In terms of the role of the PSC itself, most of those who were aware of the organisation, rated their understanding of its role as poor (56%).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most participants had heard of the Public Service Commission but were not aware of the full detail of its role.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Among those who were aware of the PSC, most (61%) were aware of the PSC's Guiding Principles, with 24% of these respondents rating their understanding of the Principles as either 'excellent' or 'good'.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most participants had heard of the guiding principles</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Of the various guiding principles, an effective communication strategy was deemed to be the most important (35%), with filling new posts in new organisations seen as the next most important principle by 16% of staff.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The three most important principles were thought to be those relating to an effective communication strategy; reorganisation and implementation of change; and equality.</li> </ul> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The survey also provided staff with an opportunity to say how effective the change process had been in meeting each of the PSC Guiding Principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Just 31% of staff believed that the change process had been communicated effectively to staff, with over twice that number (66%) of the opposite view.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ As outlined above, this echoes the perceptions of focus group participants.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Just over one quarter of staff (27%) believed that the process had been effective in meeting employer statutory obligations, with the majority recording their response as 'don't know' (51%).</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Not comparable – Focus Group participants were not asked to comment on this.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Eighteen percent believed that the process had been effective at managing vacancies, with over three times this number (63%) judging this aspect of the process to be ineffective.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The general perception in the feedback from the focus groups was that the processes for managing vacancies had not been consistent, transparent or fair.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also in relation to ensuring equality, 17% perceived this aspect of the process to be effective, with more than twice this number (39%) rating it as ineffective and 43% recording 'don't know'.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ As indicated above, there were repeated references in the focus groups with Trust staff to aspects of the recruitment and selection processes, redundancy / voluntary early retirement, relocation and job security which they perceived as inconsistent, not transparent and unfair.</li> </ul> |

## 5 SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED & KEY POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The main lessons learned related to:

- The need for the boundaries of the change process to be clear from the outset since this has important implications for communication;
- The particular importance of face-to-face communication during a time of major change and the need to complement this with a range of other methods of communication;
- The need to address the 'people issues' and distil communications down into 'What does this mean for me?';
- The need for appropriate infrastructure to be in place to support e-communication;
- The potential risk that major change, and job insecurity in particular, can have on staffs' feeling confident to voice concerns;
- The level of change which is it feasible for an organisation and its staff to manage simultaneously;
- The potential risk to staff well-being if staff are trying to sustain significantly enhanced work loads during a period of transition;
- The importance of clarifying job roles across the organisation and promoting awareness of these so as to facilitate the development of new teams;
- The need for recruitment and selection processes to be, and to be seen to be, transparent, consistent and fair;
- The importance of examining the merits of different policies and practices in a collegiate manner before determining which would be the most appropriate to adopt within any new organisation;
- Being aware that many staff will not have experienced a change on this scale before and recognising their potential need for emotional as well as practical support;
- The Public Service Commission and its need to consider what profile would be appropriate to its role.

The key points for consideration included suggestions on:

- Ensuring that the boundaries of the change process are known;
- Increasing the extent of face-to-face communication;
- Addressing the key issue of 'What does this mean for me?' as far as possible;
- Aligning IT systems in advance of the change process;
- Creating guidelines for the cascading of information;
- Enhancing the change management skills of those leading the change process;
- Suspending, if possible, initiatives that would otherwise make the change process unduly complicated;
- Reviewing the resource requirements of a major change process;
- Clarifying job roles to reduce the risk of 'role drift';
- Involving staff in a more collaborative and inclusive manner regarding the decisions about the choice of new policies and practices; and,
- What type of profile would be most appropriate for the PSC.

Further details are set out in Section 6 of the main report.

## **6. LESSONS LEARNED AND KEY POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **6.1 OVERVIEW**

This section sets out what we learned as a result of analysing the perceptions of those consulted as regards the change process and what issues merit consideration arising from this.

In each case we set out:

- What lesson we consider has been learned from the feedback we received;
- The reference to the evidence for this learning. (The use of the short hand 'Ref 1', 'Ref 2' etc refers to the comparison of the survey and focus group findings set out in Section 4.2 of the Executive Summary. All other references to supporting evidence are set out in full).
- A series of 'Key Points for Consideration' by the health and social care sector (as appropriate) and separately, local government and the education sector (each of whom are about to embark on their own respective change processes under RPA). We also link the 'Key Points for Consideration' to the PSC Guiding Principle which we consider is most relevant.

#### **Key Points for consideration**

Rather than be prescriptive about what should or should not need to be done by the various sectors, we have presented a series of 'Key Points for Consideration' and invite each sector to draw whatever learning it considers is relevant for it. We have adopted this approach for the following reasons:

- As we have indicated throughout this report, the feedback from health sector staff is based on perceptions. Whilst the views expressed by the individuals are valid in themselves, the health sector will need to consider, based on its own experience of the change process, which of the issues raised need to be addressed.
- We recognise that the RPA change processes within local government and education respectively differ significantly from those in health sector in a number of ways, including, though not limited to the political context, the numbers of staff affected, the degree of organisational and functional change, the timescales involved, the variety and magnitude of other concurrent initiatives that are underway in each sector etc. We do not assume that in terms of lessons learned or points for consideration that 'one size fits all'. Conversely, each sector must determine what learning is relevant for it in terms of where it sees the greatest risks to implementation.
- We are also aware that local government and the education sector have each already started to develop formal plans for implementation of their respective change processes. It is therefore possible that these sectors may already have anticipated and planned for one or more of the issues raised here.

- 1 The fact that the boundaries of the overall change process and the plans for implementation were altered at an advanced stage of the process created very significant challenges for those leading the implementation in terms of a) clarifying what was actually happening and b) reassuring staff during a period when no information on what was being proposed was available and c) communicating the final decisions to so many affected people in such compressed timescales. The lack of a clear plan at an advanced stage of the change process meant that clear messages could not be identified - the messages appear to have evolved and this created uncertainty and confusion.**

**Reference: Section 1.2 of Executive Summary, Ref 1 and Ref 10 in Section 4.2 of Executive Summary and Sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 in the main report.**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 10 – Reorganisation and implementation of change).*

- Be aware of the importance of determining the boundaries of the process at an early stage. Ensure that a clear and comprehensive plan is in place before implementation begins. These factors appear to be fundamental to the clarity of communication throughout the process.*
- It is almost certainly the case that a great deal more planning activity took place than people appear to realise. The question that arises is why do people perceive that this was not the case? It is clear that organisations had to change course because of unforeseen events or changes in direction imposed by political leaders, thus leading to the perception that plans were evolving as change took place. It is important that those organisations who have undergone RPA changes carry out a review of the planning processes to identify what could have been done better; and communicate their findings to those who are facing change.*

- 2 People were generally appreciative of attempts, at various levels to keep them informed of the change process. They placed a higher value on information provided internally compared with externally. There was a clear preference for face to face communication.**

**Reference: Ref 1 – 4**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 1 – Effective Communication).*

- The feedback suggests face to face communication delivered by personnel from the same organisation was the most effective mode of communication. Whilst this method is resource intensive, it seems to be the most favoured method during a period of change and uncertainty. (Guiding Principle 1 – Effective Communication).*

- 3 There was a genuine motivation to and significant resources invested in ensuring that there was effective communication with staff before and after the change process. Many staff found the information useful (see survey results) but there was a still a strong perception (see focus group feedback) that the**

information disseminated appears not to have answered the fundamental question staff had - "What does this mean for me?"

### Reference: Ref 3

*Key Points for Consideration:  
(Guiding Principle 1 – Effective Communication).*

- *The effectiveness of communication will ultimately be measured by the extent to which it has answered this fundamental question. Having clear answers to staff's questions is pivotal to this.*
- *It would seem beneficial to invest as much effort as possible anticipating the issues / queries that staff are likely to raise and to prepare the information to address those issues / queries.*
- *It would seem to be helpful to assess the impact and effectiveness of communication as the process proceeds. (This could be part of the overall process of managing and monitoring the change).*

- 4 The preferred form of communication was face to face involving staff from one's own organisation. Electronic methods of communication are welcomed but the appropriate infrastructure and access needs to be in place.**

### Reference: Ref 4

*Key Points for Consideration:*

- *IT systems need to be harmonized well in advance*
- *Guidelines are needed on how to cascade information to those without access to email. Time allowance for this is important.*
- *Verbal sessions to support those with limited literacy skills are crucial.*

- 5 There appears to have been a reticence amongst some staff to fully and openly communicate the difficulties and pressures internally. A fear factor appears to have inhibited some as a result of job insecurity combined with other concurrent pressures.**

### Reference: Ref 12

*Key Points for Consideration:  
(Guiding Principle 9 – Capacity Building)*

- *Be aware of the nature and scale of the pressure that some staff may experience as a consequence of being affected by a major change process.*
- *Make sure that the organisation has the skills or has the opportunity and the time and financial resource to acquire and / or develop the skills to effect organisational change of the magnitude and complexity required.*
- *Consider establishing a dedicated group of people (preferably independent i.e. who are not employees of the sector undergoing the change process) who are tasked with assessing employees' experience of ongoing changes (at key stages) and who can highlight to senior management where issues are arising.*

- 6 There was a perception amongst staff that there had been too much change at once (Performance Management, CSR, AFC and RPA).**

**Reference: Ref 11**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 10 – Reorganisation and Implementation of Change)*

- *Be aware of what other coinciding issues will impact on the change process.*
- *Suspend, where possible, any initiatives that are likely to add unnecessary complications to the change process.*

- 7 Senior staff within the new structures were perceived by many to be overstretched. There were concerns about the workload of staff 'in transition'. Delays in the roll out of the structures added to the difficulties.**

**Reference: Ref 11. See also Section 5.5.1 (People Challenges) and Section 5.5.2 (People Challenges) in main report.**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 4-Filling New or Substantially New Posts)*

- *Be aware that, where is no alternative to members of staff carrying additional work, of the possible impact that this can have on the individuals concerned.*
- *The resource implications of major change processes can easily be underestimated.*
- *Organisations may wish to review the resource levels estimated to undergo a major change process.*

- 8 There has been a widespread sense of disorientation as a result of the change process particularly in relation to the structural / functional changes. Participants had little clarity in terms of structures, roles and responsibilities outside their own immediate area. There was a perception, amongst some, of insufficient contact between managers and staff.**

**Reference: Ref 17, See also Section 5.5.1 (People Challenges)**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 10 - Reorganisation and Implementation of Change)*

- *During a major change, there is a risk that managers can focus disproportionately on process issues to the detriment of people issues – an appropriate balance needs to be struck.*
- *Be aware of the potential for the boundaries of jobs to become fluid and to extend well beyond what was originally intended.*
- *Be aware of the value of induction events both at business and social levels.*
- *Engage staff creatively in agreeing how the new identity will be launched and maintained e.g. around names of former legacy Trusts, wearing of name badges etc, generation of sense of new identity*

**9 Some staff perceived the more 'powerful' legacy Trusts to favour their own staff in making senior appointments.**

**Reference: Ref 13, See also Section 5.11.2 in main report under 'Perceptions of equitable treatment'.**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 4 – Filling New or Substantially New Posts)*

- *This underpins the need to ensure that recruitment and selection processes are and are seen to be transparent, consistent and fair.*

**10 Some staff perceived that the policies and practices of the more influential legacy Trusts were simply 'imported' into the new Trust regardless of their merits or otherwise.**

**Reference: Section 5.5.1 (People Challenges / Perceived loss of sense of team) of main report. Also Section 5.8 (Preparing for Change – Organisational Perspective / Suggestions for preparing organisation better).**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 10 – Reorganisation and Implementation of Change)*

- *Consider how the policies and practices of the new organisations can be and can be seen to be developed in a more collaborative and inclusive manner.*

**11 Staff have experienced an unprecedented level of change. Not having been through a change like this before, they could not have anticipated the impact on them i.e. the impact of the structural, cultural changes, the process changes, the sustained uncertainty over jobs, plus the prospect of further imminent restructuring e.g. Shared Services.**

**Reference: Ref 14**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 10 – Reorganisation and Implementation of Change)*

- *It would be helpful to provide the clearest possible information on the boundaries and scale of the change from the outset.*
- *It would also be useful to enhance staff's planning expertise to ensure the development of a comprehensive implementation plan.*
- *Agree all HR policies before change begins.*
- *Create a dedicated team with specialist knowledge who can answer staff's questions on their 'options' promptly and accurately.*
- *Be aware of the potential demand on staff welfare services during a major change process.*

**12 People have 'heard of' PSC but have little knowledge of its actual role.**

**Reference: Ref 18**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

- *PSC needs to consider what profile is appropriate to its role.*

**13 Proposals on additional guiding principles suggest possible new areas for attention.**

**Reference: Ref 18**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

- *It may be useful for PSC to consider developing additional principles related to staff welfare.*

**14 The RPA and DHSSPS web sites were thought to be helpful in the early stages of the change process but are thought to be of little value now. The information available now was largely thought to be historical. Staff appear to have very little time to 'surf web sites'.**

**Reference: Section 4.9.1 (Usefulness of Websites, Survey) and Section 5.11.1 (Websites, Focus Groups with Trust Staff)**

*Key Points for Consideration:*

*(Guiding Principle 1 – Effective Communication)*

- *Organisations might wish to consider the role of web sites in the context of a spectrum of communication processes.*
- *It may be beneficial to consider using web sites to provide strategic information and to be aware of the need to complement this with other means of communication to provide the more detailed information that people will seek.*