

Public Service Commission

Minutes of Proceedings

Friday 18th April 2008

Boardroom, 10 Cromac Place, The Gasworks

Present:

Mr Sid McDowell (Chairman)

Professor Bernard Cullen

Mr Brian Hanna

Mr Jim McCusker

Mrs Brenda McLaughlin

Dr Collim Patton

Mr Desmond Mitchell

Paul Simpson}

James Hutchinson} present for item 3

In Attendance:

Mr Brian Martin

1. Minutes of Meeting of 20 March 2008

The minutes of the 20 March meeting were agreed.

2. Matters Arising

2.1

Codes of Practice Update

DFP's minute of 11 April to the Chief Executive giving an update in respect of the development of Codes of Practice was tabled. Commissioners expressed disappointment at the length of time it is taking to promulgate these documents. Commissioners asked whether the lack of further guidance following acceptance of Guiding Principles is preventing employers implementing the Guiding Principles.

Commissioners were advised that legal opinion was awaited before the Commission could respond to DFP on the latest draft of the Code of Practice on Staff Transfers.

Agreed: Chairman to write to Director of Personnel, NICS, expressing concern expressed above. Chief Executive to clear response on Code of Practice on Staff Transfers with Chairman and Jim McCusker.

2.2

Research Project Update

Dessie Mitchell updated Commissioners on progress and on the emerging findings. Commissioners asked to meet the review team at the most appropriate time. Commissioners also expressed interest in knowing whether compliance by employers of PSC Guiding Principles was raised by staff during the review.

Agreed: Chief Executive to advise review team of above.

2.3

Role of Public Service Commission in Shared services

Commissioners were advised that a response was awaited from the Commission's legal adviser.

Agreed: Issue to be discussed at a future PSC meeting.

2.4

Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs

Sir George Bain's letter of 8 April to the Chairman was discussed. Even though some Commissioners had already met Sir George in his capacity of Chairman of the Review Team, Commissioners considered that PSC should respond to the consultation on the location of public sector jobs.

Agreed: Some Commissioners would attend the public consultation meetings. Chief Executive to draft response to the consultation document.

2.5

Education Sector Update

The update received from the Education sector was tabled. Commissioners noted the engagement with staff to date and the plans for the immediate future in respect of workshops, working groups etc. Some Commissioners indicated that they had received comments from staff in the sector suggesting that communication was not good enough. Commissioners asked whether the legislation could be enacted on time and for further information on the intention behind the work on the development of new terms and conditions of employment for ESA staff.

Agreed: Chief Executive to write to Permanent Secretary, DENI, on communication, legislative timetable and development of new terms and conditions of staff.

2.6

5th Guiding Principle Voluntary Severance

Commissioners noted that this should be considered by the Executive towards the end of April 2008.

2.7

Proposals for Health and Social Care Reform

Agreed: Chief Executive to issue Commission's response to the consultation document.

3. DOE Briefing on Local Government Developments

DOE officials gave a comprehensive briefing following the Minister's statement to the Assembly on 31 March. The Minister's letter of 15 April to the Chairman was distributed at the meeting. Discussion covered issues such as the need for transfer schemes to be consistent with those in other sectors, the legislative timetable, the need for a power of direction, the review of the functions of the Local Government Staff Commission and location.

Commissioners found the Minister's letter particularly helpful and welcomed the commitments in it, including the commitment to work with PSC to ensure that the interests of staff are protected. Commissioners considered that regular meetings with officials would be an appropriate way forward.

Agreed: Chief Executive to write to Paul Simpson, DOE, welcoming the commitments made by the Minister and suggesting regular meetings.

Commission to make a submission on the review of the Local Government Staff Commission.

4. PSC 6 Month Work Programme, Future of PSC and Compliance with PSC Guiding Principles

4.1

PSC 6 Month Work Programme

Commissioners discussed the paper which had issued with the agenda for the meeting. Commissioners agreed with the list of strategic issues facing PSC in the immediate months.

4.2

Future of PSC

Commissioners considered the discussion paper which had issued with the agenda for the meeting. The paper had been endorsed by Commissioners at a previous meeting. Commissioners were content that it remained valid, but suggested some amendments to it. It was suggested that the Commission should seek a meeting with the new Minister of Finance and Personnel when appointed.

Agreed: Chief Executive to amend the paper, agree it with the Chairman and copy to Commissioners. Chief Executive to arrange a meeting following appointment of new Minister of Finance and Personnel.

4.3

Compliance with PSC Guiding Principles

Commissioners were advised that Government officials are not yet in a position to have further discussions with the Commission on the issue. Commissioners discussed the paper which had issued with the agenda for the meeting. Commissioners confirmed their view that the Commission has a strategic oversight role but that it is not a PSC responsibility to police compliance by individual employers. Some amendments to the paper were suggested. Depending on developments Commissioners agreed that it may be necessary to seek a meeting with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Agreed: Chief Executive to amend the paper, clear with the Chairman and copy to Commissioners. Discussion to be held with Government officials when they have considered the issue.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 13 May at 10.30

Sid Keefwell

