

Public Service Commission

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 21st February 2008

Boardroom 10 Cromac Place, The Gasworks

Present:

Mr Sid McDowell (Chairman)

Professor Bernard Cullen

Mr Brian Hanna

Mr Jim McCusker

Mrs Brenda McLaughlin

Mr Desmond Mitchell

Dr Collim Patton

Mr Will Haire}

Mr Eddie Rooney} present for item 4

Mr Gavin Boyd}

In Attendance:

Mr Brian Martin

1. Apologies

None.

2. Minutes of meeting of 23 January 2008

The minutes of the 23 January meeting were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

3.1

Staff Transfers Code of Practice

Commissioners were advised that DFP had re-issued the draft Code to the Cross Sector HR Forum before going out to wider consultation.

Agreed: Commissioners to see final version of Code of Practice when available. Secretariat to let Commission's legal adviser have sight of it.

3.2

Other Codes of Practice

Commissioners were advised that DFP is drafting Codes of Practice on several of the recently agreed Guiding Principles.

3.3

Research Project Update

Dessie Mitchell advised Commissioners that the Project Steering Group had met the Consultants who would be undertaking the research. The Consultants were confident that the project would be completed by the end of June 2008.

3.4

Role of Public Service Commission in Shared services

The Chairman advised Commissioners that the broad issue of PSC Guiding Principles applying to any shared service solution would be considered at the next meeting of the Cross Sector HR Forum. He also advised Commissioners that it has been agreed that the introduction of shared services within the Health and Social Care Sector would be taken forward in the context of RPA reform and that PSC Guiding Principles would apply. Commissioners noted this helpful development.

3.5

Location of Public Sector Jobs resulting from the Review of Public Administration

The Chairman confirmed that DFP acknowledged that the Department's Framework Document could have been clearer in respect of the status of the PSC Guiding Principle on Location and could also have better reflected the wording used in the Guiding Principle on safeguarding the interests of staff. He advised Commissioners that the draft Code of Practice is being amended to reflect this outcome.

The Chairman also updated Commissioners on the helpful meeting that he and 3 other Commissioners had with Sir George Bain, Chairman of the current review on the location of public sector jobs. Commissioners advised Sir George that the Commission's Guiding Principle on Location had been accepted by the Executive and stressed the importance of safeguarding the interests of staff. Sir George was also advised of the emerging view that PSC Guiding Principles represent best practice and should be used beyond the Review of Public Administration. The need for consistency with established Government policies on Equality, Regional Development and Sustainable Development were also mentioned. Sir George had responded positively on the need to safeguard the interests of staff. The terms of reference for his group are wide ranging and include staff interests, although he stressed this is not the single interest. He did not see anything in the PSC Guiding Principle that his group would not consider.

Agreed: Chief Executive to have a continuing dialogue with Sir George Bain's group on Location of Public Sector Jobs.

3.6

Local Government Emerging Findings

The Chairman advised Commissioners that, although not finalised, the view of DOE is that the existing power of direction does not cover Location issues.

The Chief Executive advised Commissioners of an oral answer given by the DOE Minister in the Executive on 18 February which spelt out the implications of further delay.

4. Education Sector Update

The delegation from the Education sector confirmed that the target date for the implementation remains as 1 April 2009, although this is dependant on the legislative process. 1 April 2009 would be the date of transfer for staff. Work is continuing on issues such as the organisational structure for ESA and the outline Business Case. This would include issues such as staffing levels. Other issues mentioned were vacancy control, communication with staff, relationship with Trade Unions and the need to finalise the PSC Guiding Principle on Voluntary Severance.

Agreed: Education Sector to provide a written update for the Commission within a few weeks of the meeting.

5. 5th Guiding Principle Voluntary Severance

The Chairman outlined the discussions which had taken place with DFP, following input from the Cross Sector HR Forum. These had resulted in a revised draft which, on a without prejudice basis, he was prepared to recommend to the Commission and DFP would recommend to the Cross Sector HR Forum. Commissioners were given a copy of the revised draft to consider.

Agreed: Commissioners to let Chief Executive have comments by Friday 29 March.

6. Health Sector – Minister’s Statement to Assembly on 4 February 2008

The Chairman confirmed that the Minister’s statement and the follow up consultation paper had been copied to Commissioners. Commissioners considered that there were significant staff implications and that their focus should be on whether any staff have been disadvantaged.

Agreed: Health officials to be invited to May PSC to outline and discuss implications for staff.

7. Any Other Business

7.1

Libraries Bill

Agreed: Chief Executive to obtain update on the scheduling of the Libraries Bill and circulate detail to Commissioners.

Meeting with Head of Northern Ireland Civil Service

The Chairman reminded Commissioners of the meeting at 10am on 11 March.
Dessie Mitchell indicated that he would be unavailable.
Agreed: Pre meeting to be held in Stormont Castle at 9.30am.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 20 March at 10.30am.
Future meetings were arranged for 13 May and 27 June 2008.

Sid Keefwell

