

Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Minutes of the eighty-fourth Council meeting held on Wednesday 3 February 2010 at 13.00 hours in the Montgomery Room, Malone House, Belfast.

Present : Mr D McKee (Chairman) Mr D Thompson
Mrs H McClenaghan Ms M Watson
Mr J Wilkinson Ms M Crilly
Mr J Collins Mr J Clarke
Mrs D Black Ms P O'Farrell

Mrs K Godfrey (DE Representative)

Mr N Anderson (Acting Chief Executive)
Mr R Hanna (Director of Education Strategy)
Mr M Quinn (Director of Corporate Services)
Ms AM Duffy (Director of Qualifications)
Mr M Fegan (Chief Finance Officer)

Miss N Kennedy (Manager, Council Secretariat)
Mrs P Bowden (PA to Chief Executive)

Introduction

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting, in particular, Mrs Katrina Godfrey. Mrs Godfrey confirmed that she or a DE official would be attending future meetings to monitor corporate governance on Council, Remuneration and Audit and Risk Committees.

The Acting Chief Executive advised that the meeting was being held in Malone House due to the unavailability of rooms in CCEA Headquarters which were being used for processing the winter examinations.

1 Apologies

No apologies were received.

2 Chairman's Business

Election of Vice-Chair

Mr John Wilkinson proposed Mrs Helen McClenaghan. This was seconded by Mrs Mae Watson. There were no other nominations.

The Chairman confirmed that Mrs Helen McClenaghan had been elected as vice-chair and congratulated her on behalf of the Council.

(Information has been redacted under section 36(2) (c). Information to which this section applies is exempt information if, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person, disclosure of the information would otherwise prejudice, or would be likely to otherwise prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.)

A further meeting took place on 12 January 2010 with the Chief Executive Designate (ESAIT) regarding significant budget cuts for the education sector as a whole. He advised Council that CCEA's budget would be revised for 2010/11 and the necessary cuts would have to be made.

The Chairman and Council members received individual letters from the Permanent Secretary regarding their role and responsibilities in connection with governance of CCEA.

The Chairman circulated his letter to members (in confidence).

Following detailed discussion and a robust exchange of views, members stated that they were disappointed and deeply offended with the tone of the letters received. Clarification was sought on the following :

- Why was it necessary to have refresher training as all Council members received this at their induction in April 2006

The DE representative confirmed that training would be provided to all Board members of all RPA affected organisations particularly in relation to public expenditure.

- What was the intention of the letter to the Chairman?

The DE representative said that DE felt it was necessary to set out these issues in writing to seek assurances that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and were being followed for the proper management of public funds and expenditure.

She advised that DE also formally sought assurances in writing that the guidance issued to NDPBs (on an annual basis) was being followed and that there were clearly written records and audit trails. She apologised for the offence caused and stated that this was not the intention.

It was confirmed that the Chief Executive Designate had been appointed as an additional accounting officer for DE with responsibility for all the RPA affected education bodies. This had been cleared by DFP and all organisations notified. The Chairman expressed concern that the Council had not been officially informed.

(Information has been redacted under section 36(2)(b)(ii) Information to which this section applies is exempt information if, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person, disclosure of the information would, or would be likely to inhibit the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation.)

Individual members stated that they would respond to the new permanent secretary and inform the Chairman of same.

The Chairman advised that he had written to the new Permanent Secretary seeking a meeting to discuss these issues. An acknowledgement has been received.

3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 17 December 2009

The minutes of the previous meeting were signed by the Chairman.

4 Draft Discussion Paper : Proposals for Council/Committee Structures C/84/1

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

The 4 CCEA Directors joined the meeting at this time and attended for the Convergence item only.

5 Convergence

The Chairman welcomed Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive Designate to the meeting.

Budgets

The DE representative informed members that although the timetable for ESA had slipped the timetable for efficiency savings had not and a saving of £30-£40M across the sector had to be found. Therefore £13M reduction in costs needed to be realised by shared administration services to ensure the frontline is not unnecessarily affected.

She advised that a suite of key policies were being designed by DE to drive forward the raising of standards and reducing underachievement, particularly in disadvantaged communities. It was essential that these policies be driven forward in a consistent manner within the transitional arrangements.

It was confirmed that the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) had been appointed additional Accounting Officer within DE and that he had been asked to lead the convergence and streamlining process for all affected organisations.

Convergence

The Chief Executive Designate (ESA) confirmed that the budget cuts were significant and would have an impact on the whole education system. In order to protect the classroom and direct services to children and young people it would be necessary to streamline administration and bureaucracy and this has been agreed as the way forward.

Although this largely relates to the Education and Library Boards, there will also be implications for CCEA. There will be re-organisation and slimming down of management structures at senior and middle management across the organisations. There will also be a large range of regionally directed and locally managed shared services.

Following a detailed discussion on convergence and budget issues the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) said he would wish to engage with senior officers and Council to ensure Council are satisfied that the statutory responsibilities are discharged effectively and to update and discuss with the members progress on Convergence between now and 31 March 2010.

The Chairman asked for the dates of the Council meetings to be provided to the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) and DE.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive Designate (ESA) and the DE representative for their input into the meeting.

Mr Boyd and Mrs Godfrey left the meeting at this point.

Letters

The following points were put forward for consideration and action:

- Council members to consider responding individually to their letters.
- *(Information has been redacted under section 36(2)(b)(ii) Information to which this section applies is exempt information if, in the reasonable opinion of a*

- Confirmation to be sought from DE that all aspects of CCEA pay policy were subject to the wider pay remit policy in line with Treasury Guidelines.

Members noted that confirmation on the status of the pay remit issue was given as several discussions with DE had taken place and they confirmed work was ongoing.

CCEA staff has been kept fully informed throughout the process.

Committee Membership/Streamlining of Services

The Chairman confirmed that Finance (& Business) and an Audit & Risk Committees were required. He suggested that 5 members were appropriate for Finance and 4 for Audit and Risk and asked members to inform Miss Kennedy of their first preference.

He advised that first preferences would be accommodated as much as possible, however he would make the final decision on membership.

He sought agreement to invite independent members with relevant expertise to sit on the committees as required. Members agreed.

6 Any Other Business

None identified by the Secretariat.

7 Draft Schedule of Meetings February – June 2010

A draft schedule of meetings was tabled for members' information. It was agreed that this would be reviewed with the Chairs of Committees and circulated as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked members for their input into the meeting.