

MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING
Thursday 27 June 2024
Conference Room, Rathgael House

Attendees:

Mark Browne (Chair)
Ronnie Armour
Faustina Graham
Linsey Farrell
Anna Carragher
Marcella Phillips
Kim Martin
Neil Palmer
Suzanne Kingon
James Hutchinson

Apologies:

Heather Cousins
Bryan Laverty

In attendance:

Kiera Vince (deputising Board secretary)
Rebecca Emerson (Observer)
Sean McCarthy (Observer)

Permanent Secretary Update

Mark discussed the upcoming elections and the impact this will have on Ministerial decisions during this time. He also discussed the Ministers work on a long-term vision surrounding the Independent Review.

There was an update from Mark on the G6/7 Development Day.

Grade 3 Updates

G3s provided updates on their individual areas.

Items discussed were:

- (RA) Pay and Grading review and agreement with unions.
- (LF) Ongoing work on SEN placements with EA.
- (SK) Strule – direction of travel is that a Ministerial direction will be required. Executive meeting will be held (after general election) to seek agreement, with award of contract by the end of the summer.
- (JH) Consultation on uniforms has issued. Likelihood that there may also be a consultation on FSMs.

Director of Finance Report

Neil provided members with an update on the current key financial issues.

Taking into consideration pressures on the 2024/25 Resource Budget, including the Pay & Grading Review and Teachers pay, there is a shortfall of c £220m in the current budget.

As reported at the meeting in May, the Minister commissioned an exercise to consider a cut of 10% savings across all budget lines. A submission is going to the Minister this week and will outline savings.

The Board noted that savings identified, and deliverable are well short of those necessary to balance the budget and significant action will be required to achieve the level of savings needed.

In the June monitoring exercise DE submitted bids totalling c£293.4m of inescapable key resource pressures and £113.8m for high priority requirements which were not funded by the initial Capital Budget allocation. We await the outcome of the monitoring round.

Outside of the monitoring exercise the Department has secured funding as follows:

- £44m for the Pay & Grading Review;
- £25m for the Early Years & Childcare Strategy; and
- £60m in Fresh Start Capital funding.

Neil advised that HOCS has initiated a Transformation programme supported by £47m per annum. Departments have been invited to submit bids to the programme as follows:

Two high value bids up to £100m;
Four small bids up to £2m.

Neil updated the Board on:

- Capital budget;
- Earmarked budgets;
- Annual reports and accounts;
- High Risk EA IT projects; and
- Contracts.

HR Report

Marcella provided an update to the Board on the HR report.

She provided an update on resourcing including:

- Interviews for DP/SO/EO1 competitions have progressed. The successful candidates from these competitions are expected to be placed during the summer months. Supply is expected to meet demand.
- There are 67 vacancies listed with NICSHR, and a further 38 have been confirmed by TMG at their meeting in May
- There are 4 vacancies within the Inspectorate for which competitions are currently underway.

- The G6/7 General Service Competition will be discussed at the next PSS meeting.
- The AO competition is expected to launch soon.

Mark mentioned that PSS has agreed that there should be a general injunction on the number of TP's to reduce numbers.

Marcella confirmed that there are no particular hot spots within the Department regarding sick absence.

Marcella also provided an update on Performance management. Over the coming weeks she will produce statistics to provide to G3's so they can see at a glance which areas need to improve their completion rates. Mark asked that instructions for the completion of PPA/PDP's and In Year/End Year Reviews are re-circulated.

Following on from the G6/7 Development Day, Marcella discussed the Impact Leadership Programme and that it may be worthwhile encouraging staff in those grades to take up that learning.

Marcella discussed the Health and Wellbeing Forums that will be taking place in Rathgael House, and the possibility of these sessions also being provided in the Northwest.

Business Plan & Performance

The Board noted Kim's paper on Business Plan and Performance.

There was discussion on Performance Measures, Kim highlighted the challenges and agreed to raise this at the next Data Strategy Group. Ronnie said he is aware of the challenges EGT are having on Performance Measures, and that he sees this directly as an issue for policy teams (rather than EGT).

There was also discussion about the use of statisticians and drawing out a narrative of issues relevant to policy officials and the production an annual compendium.

Kim advised that all ALB Business Plans have been agreed and approved, with the exception of the EA. A further draft is expected this week.

Risk

Kim spoke to her paper and the Board agreed it with the following changes:

- Finance risk to be escalated to 5x5
- The risks associated with EA needs to be more fully addressed. There were options for having this as a stand-alone risk ie in terms of its failure to delivery key services, or to be part of Risk 2 or 3.

ARAC Update

The Board noted the ARAC Update paper.

Non Departmental Public Bodies – verbal update

Linsey advised the following:

Working closely with CCEA on exams and currently all is going well;

Work within CCEA on the curriculum is moving slowly due to resources, however DE is maintaining positive relations with frequent engagement.

Ronnie reported:

The CCMS GAR is next week – no concerns at present;

Work is ongoing to improve oversight mechanisms within the EA.

AOB

Linsey raised an issue with PPEs highlighting her concerns that they don't appear to report on whether the project made any difference and its impact (rather she saw them as a mechanism to report whether the project was completed on time and within budget).

Kim agreed to discuss with EAU and provide a short paper at the next Board meeting on this.

Faustina advised that inspection of schools is back up and running with:

- 25 follow-up inspections completed; and
- 8 pilot inspections undertaken.

Positive feedback has been received from school regarding the inspection process.