

MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING
Thursday 24 August 2023
Conference Room, Rathgael House

Attendees:

Mark Browne (Chair)
Linsey Farrell
Heather Cousins
Ronnie Armour
Faustina Graham
Gary Fair
Paul Corrigan
Andrew Scott (items 8, 9, 11 and 12)
Marcella Phillips
Catherine Shannon (NICSHR) (Item 3)
Karen McCullough (Item 5)
Suzanne Kingon (Item 6)
Kim Martin (Item 7)

Apologies:

Joan McEwan

In attendance:

Bryan Laverty (Board Secretary)

Observer:

Ruth Galwey – DP (DALO) – Private Office

Customer Focus and Service Delivery for NICSHR

Catherine Shannon provided the Board with an update on the Pulse Survey and advised that the DE survey is ongoing. The Survey focuses on what the NICSHR can do better and the provision of tailored support for partners.

Catherine outlined the key activities that she is undertaking in her role as NICSHR Director of Strategic Planning and Governance. Catherine offered to return once the Pulse Survey is completed.

HR Update

Marcella presented the HR Report and provided an update on HR issues to the Board.

Marcella advised that in response to the request from NICSHR that departments critically review their staffing position, DE has withdrawn all but nine of its approved vacancies from NICSHR's Vacancy Tracker. She added that there remains supply from AO to DP grades.

Marcella reported that there are currently Sandwich Course vacancies within DE and advised that the Department may wish to seek interest from Teams in hosting a student.

14-19 Work Programme

Karen presented her paper which provided an overview of the work taken forward as part of the 14-19 agenda.

Karen explained that to deliver the outcomes and strategic vision in the 14-19 Framework, DE needs to turn its attention to the more fundamental policy reviews and reform, and to address several challenges to progress.

Karen noted several challenges to progress.

The Board thanked Karen for her presentation, and noted:

- the resource issues;
- the situation regarding qualifications; and
- the involvement of DE officials with the work taken forward by the OECD.

Capital Update

Suzanne provided the Board with an update on the overall Departmental capital budget position in 2023/24 and the measures taken forward and being investigated to control expenditure.

Suzanne explained the current budget position and a number of actions taken to control spend.

The Board noted that DoF has asked departments to register bids for capital DEL. Officials are currently developing the relevant bids however, DoF has indicated that the amount of funding available is limited.

Suzanne advised that while there is currently a shortfall of Fresh Start funding, DoF has indicated that the funding should become available.

The Board discussed:

- Possible impacts if additional funding is not secured;
- The need to consider the Department's capital strategy and the longer term needs of both the youth and schools sectors;
- The longer-term impact of decisions taken this year to manage spend;
- The impact of net zero requirements on the capital budget; and
- Current position of the overall Fresh Start Programme.

Reconstitution of Controlled and Maintained Boards of Governors

Andrew presented his paper which advised the Board of the forthcoming reconstitution of the Board of Governors of Controlled and Maintained schools scheduled for 2024.

The Board noted progress to date and the communications strategy that has been developed. Andrew highlighted the risks to the process including any requirement for vetting checks, and ongoing industrial action in schools.

Vetting of School Governors

Kim and Andrew presented the paper, which provided the Board with an update to the discussion held at the meeting in November 2022.

The Board noted that:

- Governor responsibilities do not fall under regulated activity given the typical nature of the work;
- As such a barred list check cannot be provided; and
- The variety of approaches used across the UK and the RoI.

The Board requested a paper to outline how a proposed approach could be progressed, to include no vetting by default while providing exception processes for occasions when a governor is involved in a regulated activity.

Finance Director Report

Gary provided members with an update on the current key financial issues including:

The current budget position, including:

- the EA's funding pressures;
- School Financial Plans;
- Earmarked funding;
- The 2023-24 Summer exercise; and
- The 2024-25 Resource Budget Setting process.

Gary reported that the SIMS contractual issue remains high risk.

Business Planning 2024/25

Andrew presented his paper which informed the Board of the process to develop Business Plans for 2024/25, both for the Department and its non-departmental public bodies.

The Board noted the timetable for the preparation of the DE Business Plan and the process for the development of Plans for NDPBs.

DE External Complaints

The Board noted the External Complaints Report for 2022/23.

Update from ARAC Meeting on 31 May 2023, DE ARAC Annual Report 2022-23 & DE ARAC Terms of Reference July 2023

The Board noted the contents of the ARAC report, the ARAC Annual Report 2022/23, and its updated Terms of Reference.

Non Departmental Public Bodies

Linsey advised that:

- CCEA is pleased with the delivery and communications around the publication of examination results this year;
- The external assessors in CCEA have submitted a number of actions which are under consideration by the CEO. She will update the Board in due course;
- Eve Bremner has taken up post as CEO of CCMS.

Mark noted that the interim Director on the SEN side of the EA is currently on sick leave. He noted an issue around resourcing generally within the organisation.

Andrew reported that following the PSNI data breach, Information Management Team is looking at DE's existing data management procedures to identify any issues or required updates.

AOB

The Board noted that a paper on the process for appointing a new NEBM to replace Joan is with Mark for consideration.