

MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING
Thursday 5 October 2023
Conference Room, Rathgael House

Attendees:

Mark Browne (Chair)
Linsey Farrell
Ronnie Armour
Gary Fair
Andrew Scott
Kim Martin (item 2a)
Marcella Phillips
Ricky Irwin (Item 3)
Janis Scallon (Item 3)
Julie McBride (Item 3)

Apologies:

Bryan Laverty
Heather Cousins
Paul Corrigan
Faustina Graham

In attendance:

Gary Bennett (Board Secretary)

Observer:

Lauren Smythe – Deputy Principal – Qualifications, 14 to 19 Strategy and Youth Work Policy

Matters Arising

(a) School Governor Vetting – following the meeting of 24 August, a paper on School Governor Vetting was presented. Andrew outlined the Vetting process for DE appointed Boards of Governors with wider consideration given to the vetting approach.

There was discussion around the vetting process. The Board agreed the recommendations contained within the paper.

(b) CCEA Assessors Recommendations – Linsey outlined the CCEA Governance Action Plan following the appointments of Assessors to the CCEA Council. The key recommendations were highlighted and discussed with a view to commencing an exit-strategy for the Assessors on the condition that the Department would continue to monitor delivery of the actions in response to the recommendations.

Linsey highlighted that the first meeting of a steering group (including CCEA CEO and Chair) will take place 9 October 2023 in relation to the development of the DE/CCEA Partnership Agreement.

The Board discussed and noted the contents of the paper.

End to End Review of SEN

Ricky provided background to the genesis of the End-to-End Review, outlined that the End-to-End Review consists of 12 Deep dives/work streams, reflecting complexity of the overall task and necessity to look at a multitude of areas, and highlighted a number of priority areas which have been identified.

Resistance to change was discussed, the Board agreed that demonstration of models working is also extremely important; with good communication, the promotion of key messages and managing expectations pivotal to this.

Ricky also explained there is work going on within the wider education system to moving to a more inclusive system and it will be beneficial to the Board to get further updates in future.

Early intervention models were also highlighted as important to the process overall.

Julie explained that schools will be approached in October/November with a list of options prepared and ready for all schools next year. This will expand on the existing suite of four options for SEN provision within schools. EA wish to launch this September 2024 however the Board agreed that this should be as soon as possible.

Mark highlighted that issues around employment cannot slow down the process. It is important to move forward while still being cognisant of the risks right across the sector.

Capital Budget Update (to include RAAC update)

A paper was provided to the Board with an update on the on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The contents of the paper were noted.

Finance Director Report

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

Gary explained that additional in-year Resource allocations are unlikely, although there may be some small additional Capital allocations, depending on the extent of bids by other Departments.

Gary also updated the Board on:

- the EA Block Grant position;
- Schools' forecast spend – there was some discussion around the allocation of emergency cash grants to some voluntary grammar or grant-maintained integrated schools; and
- EA Earmarked funding, including some pressures.

Given the likely scale of the funding gap next year and beyond, Gary advised that he would be coordinating an exercise to identify and consider all possible future savings and sustainability proposals moving forward. This will focus on DE policy leads engaging with their operational counterparts in the Education Authority (EA) to produce a long list of proposals for internal discussion in the first instance.

Gary also noted that there were an increasing number of approvals being sought by the EA for out of court settlements.

Update from ARAC Meeting

Joan updated the Board on the latest ARAC meeting, including:

- Strule
- GTCNI
- Capita SIMS
- Audit
- Consolidated Accounts
- Risk Registers

DE 2023/24 Business Plan (Mid-Year Report)

Andrew presented his paper which advised the Board of the changes to the Business Plan which gives enhanced information for Board through the new Performance Measures Tracker.

Risk Management

Andrew presented the paper, which provided the Board with an update on Risk Management. Quality assurance exercise was generally positive, however there are improvements to be made.

Capital risk R6 to be re-examined with a view to being upgraded.

HR Report

Marcella updated the Board on the HR Report. There was brief discussion around long term temporary promotions and the need to ensure TPs do not become long term where possible whilst also being mindful of the current budgetary position.

Mainstreaming Equality

Andrew presented a paper provided by the Equality Unit in respect of Mainstreaming Equality for the Board to note.

There was discussion around the number of screenings and EQIAs both in DE and ALBs.

Non Departmental Public Bodies

Andrew mentioned partnership agreements, work with the EA on their partnership agreement will commence soon.