

Political Impasse throws 2011 into Serious Difficulty

The Special Edition of NIPSA Reports (November 2009) carried a story on the effective date for Local Government RPA – ***‘Place Your Bets Red 2011 Black 2015’*** and questioned the proposed implementation date for RPA.

It was known that failure of the NI Executive to clear the stumbling blocks by the end of January 2010 would rule out a 2011 date. As with other RPA issues such as the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (now postponed with no date for its establishment) the politicians have either sidelined the matter or more likely are using the issues as a pawn in the chess match over the devolution of Policing and Justice. Regardless of the reason(s) it is wholly unacceptable to continue to place Local Government staff in such an uncertain position over the RPA date.

At the Local Government Reform Joint Forum (LGRJF) meeting of 27 January, NIPSA and the other Unions highlighted the concerns of members and the debilitating impact the uncertainty was having. It was also made clear that it would be unacceptable and unworkable to expect May 2011 to be met, even if an early solution was found to the wider political impasse.

The views of NIPSA were not only shared by the other Unions but equally by those on the Employers Side representing Local Government. The Trade Union Side is pressing for the LGRJF to seek an urgent

meeting with the DOE Minister to discuss the RPA timeline and a number of other RPA matters, as reported on in this update.

Draft Staff Severance Scheme

NIPSA Branches were consulted on the draft of the proposed RPA Local Government Staff Severance Scheme (see Branch Secretary Circular 21/12/09). The LGRJF meeting of the 27 January gave further consideration to the draft scheme and on foot of comments from both sides a final draft is to be prepared and hopefully signed-off at the next meeting on the 17 February.

The biggest issue remains the funding for a scheme and the signs are most concerning that the Local Government Sector will be cast adrift whilst the NI Executive continues to fully fund RPA Severance Schemes in the other Sectors. Indeed, the position has moved to the worst potential scenario with not only no central money, the proposed loan arrangement has now moved from DFP loans to obtaining loans from the market place. This would see loans at a high interest rate, resulting in problems for Councils in repaying loans with the direct consequential impact of further staff cuts.

NIPSA is continuing to pressurise and press the DOE Minister, DOE and the LGRJF Employers Side to ensure that the severance scheme is fully funded by DFP, so as to ensure equitable treatment between the Sectors and to avoid further local government job losses.

Appointments to Posts in the New Councils

The LGRJF has been engaged in discussions with Senior Counsel in order to obtain a legal opinion on the appointment process for the posts at Senior level. The matter was referred to the LGRJF by the DOE Minister, against a backdrop of politicians at all levels looking to have posts filled by public advertisement. NIPSA has made it clear that it will oppose any public advertisement of posts as this is outwith the PSC Guiding Principles and contrary to redundancy law.

The opinion from Senior Counsel is under consideration by the LGRJF, however I can report that the overarching thrust of the opinion fully underpins NIPSA's position. It is hoped that over the next 2/3 weeks to have the Employers Side sign-off the opinion and for the LGRJF to meet with the Minister to advise him of the agreed LGRJF process for filling the posts.

In parallel with the consideration of the candidate pool work has been ongoing to develop the Job Description and related documents for Chief Executive appointments.

Once the process is complete for the Chief Executive posts work will commence on developing a comprehensive policy agreement on the filling of all posts in the new Councils.

Staff Transfer Scheme

The LGRJF leads have considered a first draft of the Local Government Staff Transfer Scheme. The Scheme will be based on other RPA Staff Transfer Schemes, in particular the Northern Ireland Libraries Authority and the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) Schemes, with suitable amendments and additions to ensure that the specifics of Local Government RPA are dealt with e.g. consideration of the Group Staff issues.

It will require consideration of a number of drafts before reaching a point where the Scheme can be put out to Branches for consultation. NIPSA has also raised with the DOE the need for the Scheme to be enshrined in legislation, most likely as a Schedule to the Local Government Reorganisation Bill (as yet not published).

Vacancy Controls

The first phase of vacancy controls, introduced with effect from 1 October, have yet to be extended due to the uncertainty of the May 2011 implementation date. The LGRJF agreed at its meeting in late November that it would provide for the suspension of some or all of the vacancy controls as detailed in LGRJF/01 in the event of the 2011 timeline being deferred. The next LGRJF meeting in late February will give initial consideration to the potential need to suspend some or all of the Vacancy Controls.

Branches are reminded that Councils should be consulting on the application of the vacancy control arrangements.

Local Joint Forums

The LGRJF agreed to establish 11 Local Joint Forums, one in each cluster, to deal with RPA matters. The Local Forums will be responsible for ensuring that agreements reached at the main forum, such as Vacancy Controls, are implemented and that there is full engagement with the trade unions at the cluster level. Should RPA in Local Government progress the involvement of the Local Forums will be enhanced by having to take forward definitive discussions on the Structural implementation plans.

A number of the Local Forums have held inaugural meetings and it is hoped that those that have yet to meet will do so shortly. As with the main Forum NIPSA is making the case that it should have the greatest number of seats, to reflect not just NIPSA being the largest Local Government union but also that it is NIPSA members who are most affected by RPA. In addition of the 1,100 staff due to transfer to Local Government NIPSA represents over 800 of these staff.

PWC Phase II Economic Appraisal Report

NIPSA submitted a detailed response to the PWC Phase II Economic Appraisal of the options for Local Government reorganisation. The NIPSA submission can be found on the

website – www.nipsa.org.uk/Campaigns/Review-of-Public-Administration/Local-Government/NIPSA-Responds

In the response NIPSA condemned PWC for going beyond its remit by proposing not only a BSO but also the establishment of a single waste authority. It also sought to place the burden of the implementation costs of RPA in Local Government more onto the ratepayer when in other Sectors the cost has come via central funding, especially in regard to the funding of the Voluntary redundancy schemes. NIPSA highlighted that such an approach was unfair and placed Local Government employees at greater risk. The report identifies implementation costs of £118 million but sets out cuts of £438 million over a 25 year period. The Minister failed to disguise his political bias in his Assembly speech when he endorsed the BSO proposition and attacked the concept of voluntary redundancy payments for Local Government employees.

He continued to be out of step following the consideration of consultation responses which all rejected the proposal for a BSO when he asked Local Government to give further consideration to the principles of a BSO. The section above on Severance also highlights the failure of the DOE Minister to secure equitable treatment for the Local Government Sector.

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Please fill in Parts 1 and 2 of this Application Form in BLOCK CAPITALS and return to your Branch Secretary or NIPSA.

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Surname:

Forenames:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms
(delete as applicable)

Home Address: (please include postcode)

Workplace Address: (please include postcode)

Address to be used for delivery of NIPSA voting papers: Home Work Date of Birth:

Do you work: Full Time? Part Time? Job Share? Term Time?

Daytime Tel No & Ext: Occupation: Grade:

Mobile No: E-mail:

Have you previously been a member of NIPSA? Yes No

Reason for leaving: Resigned Left Service Career Break Changed Employer Other

Have you been a member of any other Trade Union(s)? Yes No

If 'Yes' please answer the following questions

Name of Union to which you most recently belonged: Date of Resignation:

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Name of former Branch Secretary:

I declare to the best of my knowledge the answers to the above questions are correct. If my application is accepted, I agree to abide by the rules of NIPSA and authorise the deduction from my salary of the appropriate subscription.

Signature: Date:

PART 2 DIRECT DEDUCTION FROM SALARY

I (Surname in BLOCK CAPITALS and Forenames in full)

authorise the deduction from my salary, until further notice the appropriate subscriptions to be paid to NIPSA. I also agree that if the subscription should be varied the deduction should be varied accordingly.

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