

HCS/1592/03

**SUMMARY OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING – FRIDAY
7 NOVEMBER 2003 IN ROOM GD.10, STORMONT CASTLE**

Present: Nigel Hamilton (Chair)
Will Haire
John Hunter
Andrew McCormick
Aideen McGinley
Gerry McGinn
Stephen Peover
Bruce Robinson
Alan Shannon
Paul Simpson
Pat Toal
David Watkins

Apologies: Stephen Quinn

In Attendance: Linda Brown

Stephen Grimason } for Election
Rosalie Flanagan } issues

Debbie Sweeney – Secretary

1. The Minutes of PSG meeting on 24 October were agreed and issued in final form.

2. **Matters Arising**

Mr Hamilton advised PSG that the meeting with the Secretary of State was now 1 December 2003 at 12 noon in Castle Buildings.

3. **SCS Management Issues**

All issues were agreed and a 'Dear Permanent Secretary' letter would be issued by CPG following the meeting.

[Action: Mrs Brown]

Mrs Brown advised PSG that the recent DHSSPS vacancy notice issued on 6 November would be the last trawl for Passport Holders – they have been notified.

Mr Hamilton reminded PSG that Career Development Profiles were now overdue.

[Action: PSG Members]

4. Smoking Policy

Smoking Policy was discussed and agreed in principle. Mrs Brown to raise at PDG to consider the practicalities of the policy and when agreed, a submission should be sent to the Minister and copied to PSG members for comments before tabled at PSG meeting.

[Action: Mrs Brown]

5. Resourcing the HR Function

Mrs Brown informed PSG that this topic had not been discussed at PDG but had been circulated for written comments. The paper concentrated on resourcing and the HR Policy function.

PSG members agreed in principle to the benefits which could arise from filling a small number of key policy posts with suitably skilled staff and the paper's recommendations were accepted. Mrs Brown was asked to consider secondments from as wide a pool as possible – Departments, the private sector and particularly the wider Health sector in NI.

Mrs Brown to agree operational details with PDG. Further work would be done on a paper to consider wider skilling/resourcing issues in the wider HR function.

[Action: Mrs Brown]

6. Redeployment/Redundancy – Future Pressures on the NICS

Mrs Brown highlighted the public sector reforms which may take place across the NICS over the next few years.

7. SCS Generic Competition

Mrs Brown informed PSG that the SCS Competition would be advertised in the press on 27 November.

8. Civil Service Commissioners

Mr Hamilton updated PSG on his meeting with the Civil Service Commissioners at which the Merit Principles and Code of Ethics were discussed.

Mr Hamilton informed PSG that he would be writing to members regarding sub-group membership.

[Action: Mr Hamilton]

9. **Election Business**

Mrs Flanagan and Mr Grimason advised PSG on the Election Business Committee and the Purdah Period.

10. **Tour de Table**

Sudden Oak Death

Mr Toal reported that the first case in the British Isles of Sudden Oak Death (Phytophthora Ramorum) in a tree as opposed to shrubs, had been found in an oak on an estate in Southern England.

Electricity

Mr Robinson reported on current electricity issues.

NICS Pay Update

Dr McCormick updated PSG on the current state of play regarding Civil Service pay.

Committee F

Mr McGinn reported that Committee F report would be ready by the end of November.

Costello Group

Mr McGinn reported that the Costello Group report would be complete by 30 November.

Teachers' Pay

Mr McGinn reported that the penultimate part of the Independent Inquiry Report was complete.

North/South Roundtable

Mr Robinson and Mr McGinn or Mr Shannon would attend on 24 November.

Sustainable Development Committee

The annual meeting would take place in February. Mr Peover to remind PSG when a date has been finalised.

[Action: Mr Peover]

European Charter on Minority and Regional Languages

Mr Peover reported that Lisburn Borough Council have notified DOE that the Charter does not apply to District Councils.

Security Vetting

Mr Hunter reminded PSG of the Seminar on 12 November at Newforge.

Mrs Brown said CPG were issuing guidance for people who have access to staff addresses.

[Action: Mrs Brown]

Chief Executive's Forum

Dr McGinley asked that members consider participating in a panel discussion at the Forum on 28 November.

Mr Hunter agreed to attend. PSG members to reply to Dr McGinley.

[Action: PSG members]

Children in Need

PSG agreed that the signed Tyrone Shirt be auctioned Departmental-wide for Children in Need. DCAL personnel to contact Personnel Branches.

[Action: Dr McGinley]

Prison Service

Mr Watkins updated PSG on the current Prison Service issues.

Irish Presidency

Mr Shannon reported that useful meetings of areas of interest would be held and recommended Ministerial involvement.

Mr Haire confirmed that he would be taking this issue forward as the liaison point of contact.

[Action: Mr Haire]

Elections

Mr Hamilton informed PSG that the Electoral office were short of temporary staff to carry out polling day functions. Once specific areas with shortages have been identified, staff can be encouraged to fill the vacancies, with details being provided through CPG.

[Action: Mrs Brown]

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