

**SUMMARY OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 8 NOVEMBER 2004**

PRESENT: Mr Hamilton, Mrs Angus, Ms Bunting, Ms Flanagan,
Mr Gray, Mr Grimason, Mr Jardine, Mr McCartney, Mr
McConnell, Dr Smyth, Mr Sweeney.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Higgins (Secretary)

APOLOGIES: Mr Cushnahan.

1. Minutes of Last Meeting

The summaries of the Departmental Board meetings on 18 and 21 October 2004 were agreed as amended.

2. Matters Arising

Matters arising were dealt with under the appropriate scheduled agenda items.

3. Standing Items

(a) Finance, Accountability and Risk

Mr Sweeney tabled a paper on (a) Outturn Information for April–September 2004, and updates on (b) In-year September Monitoring and (c) Budget 2004. He explained that he was taking forward the Budget 2004 exercise as part of bilateral meetings, with some Directors.

Mr Sweeney also reported that non-spends for the current financial year needed to be reported by 19 November and that Departments are required to identify, by 12 November, options for reduction amounting to 1½% of the Departmental provision. For OFMDFM this amounts to £0.9m, £1.0m and £1.0m across the Budget period, 2005/06 to 2007/08.

It was agreed that the bilateral meetings with Directors would continue and Budget 2004 matters would be tabled for further discussion at the December Departmental Board meeting. **Action: Directors.**

Mr Sweeney reported that the OFMDFM Resource Accounts 2003-04 were certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 29 October 2004 without qualification and are now in the process of being laid and published.

(b) Departmental Board Forward Plan

The Board approved an updated version of the plan for the period ending 14 March 2005.

(c) Assembly Issues

Ms Flanagan reported that a meeting had taken place with Directors on restoration planning issues. Follow up sessions could be held with heads of Divisions, to discuss issues in more detail, when a timescale for restoration was clearer.

(d) Freedom of Information (FOI)

Mrs Angus tabled a paper which provided an update on the Department's overall state of preparedness for the full introduction of the FOI Act on 1 January 2005. The paper summarised the key actions which are taking place to ensure that OFMDFM will be in a position to respond positively to the demands of FOI. Local Information Managers (LIMs) would play a key role in dealing with requests for information, supported by appropriate "expert" staff from the relevant business area. The contribution of LIMs to date was commended particularly as they are undertaking their FOI role

in addition to their normal duties and other new information management responsibilities.

A general discussion addressed related issues including the Data Protection Act, the Code of Practice on Government Information and handling of requests for information which may involve cross-departmental issues. It was agreed that the latter issue would be examined to clarify the policy on handling such requests and the outcome reported back to the Board. **Action: Corporate Services.**

4(a) North South Issues

This item was deferred from the previous Board meeting and Dr Smyth delivered a presentation which provided an update on North South issues. His presentation covered the six implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland, interim procedures, corporate governance and an outline of areas of co-operation.

5(a) Proposals for Departmental Conference

Mrs Angus tabled a paper on a proposal to hold a conference in the first quarter of 2005 and the Board agreed to defer the item for detailed discussion at the December Board meeting. **Action: Board Members.**

5(b) Departmental Brief

The Board agreed a number of amendments to the November Departmental Brief for the purposes of initiating the Team Briefing process within the Department.

6. Tour de Table

- (a) Mr McConnell provided an update on the Review of Public Administration and explained that the future focus would be on the publication of a paper on firm proposals for consultation which is likely to attract renewed media and political interest.

- (b) Mr Gray reported that there is a full Legislative Programme and that progress continued to be made and supported through effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

- (c) Ms Bunting reported on community relation issues including the Urban Regeneration and Community Development Strategy, led by the Department of Social Development. The strategy is partly concerned with neighbourhood renewal areas and the development of task forces in those areas to address themes such as education and employment. Ms Bunting also advised that work is progressing on finalising "A Shared Future", the policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland.

8. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Wednesday 15 December 2004 in the 4th Floor Conference Room, Castle Buildings. It will be preceded by a meeting of the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

MARK HIGGINS

15 November 2004