

**SUMMARY OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETINGS
ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2004**

- PRESENT:** Mr Hamilton, Mrs Angus, Ms Archbold,
Mr Cushnahan, Ms Flanagan, Mr Gray, Mr McCartney,
Mr McConnell, Mr McCormick, Mr Sweeney.
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr Higgins (Secretary) Mr Playfair, Mr Simpson.
- APOLOGIES:** Ms Bunting, Mr Grimason, Mr Jardine, Dr Smyth

1. Minutes of Last Meeting

The summaries of the Departmental Board meetings held on 14 and 15 June 2004 were agreed as amended.

2. Matters Arising

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

3. Standing Items

(a) Assembly Issues

Ms Flanagan reported on the latest position in respect of the political Review Talks which resumed in Parliament Buildings at the beginning of September. These were followed by bi-lateral discussions between Ministers and Parties and the next stage will be a round of intensive discussions in Leeds Castle in Kent, between 16 and 18 September.

(b) Departmental Board Forward Plan

It was agreed that Directors would review the "Human Resource Issues" and "Policy Issues" sections of the Forward Plan and submit suggestions for December 2004 and January to March 2005 to the secretary of the Departmental Board in advance of the next Board meeting. **Action: Directors.**

(c) Finance, Accountability and Risk

Mr Sweeney tabled a paper on (a) Outturn information which detailed expenditure against budget for April to July 2004; (b) In-Year September 2004 monitoring and the outcome of June 2004 monitoring reports; (c) Provisional Budget 2004 financial allocations; and (d) the Department's Resource Accounts for 2003-2004 financial year.

Mr Cushnahan emphasised the benefits of examining historical data, for example for the previous three years to identify financial trends, patterns and percentage underspends at all levels. It was agreed that Finance Branch and Directors would undertake a frank analysis of past spending trends and revisit that issue at the next Board meeting. **Action: Directors.**

The Board noted that, as with all Departments, the Budget 2004 allocations for the Budget period 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08 were severely constrained and that the Departmental Budget was also required to deliver significant efficiencies over the Budget period. The Board noted that all spending areas including Non-Departmental Public Bodies would be included in the identification of efficiencies. **Action: Finance Branch/Directors.**

It was agreed that 1% of the Department's annual budget would be identified as easements as requested by DFP. Paul Sweeney and Finance Division will identify these easements in areas of budgetary discretions eg SIB, sites, community relations and North Belfast.

With regard to the Budget 2004 a further £1m per annum in 2005/06 and 2006/07 would have to be found in terms of efficiencies. In the first instance this will be identified on a pro rata basis for further discussion at the October Board meeting.

Regarding the September monitoring round the Board accepted that the recommended bids be submitted to DFP.

4. Current Issues

(a) Annual Report to the Equality Commission Northern Ireland 2003/04

Ms Archbold provided the Board with an update on the position with regard to the annual report on progress for 2003/04 to the Equality Commission. Ms Archbold thanked Board members for their assistance in completing the annual reports. The Board and Minister had cleared the report and it was agreed that a letter would be forwarded to the Equality Commission to advise that the Department's annual report is final. **Action: Equality Directorate.**

(b) Quarterly Report on implementation of the Equality Scheme

Ms Archbold tabled the first quarterly update on progress on implementation of the Department's equality scheme for the quarter 1 April to 30 June 2004. The Board noted the progress made and agreed that equality should be included in the business objectives of key staff in the Department, particularly those with policy/strategy development. **Action: Directors**

It was also agreed to advise staff that equality obligations should be included in the personal performance plans of appropriate staff by including a reference to that obligation in the September Departmental Brief. **Action: Corporate Services.**

5. Papers

(a) Draft Public Service Agreement (PSA) 2005-06

Mr Sweeney tabled a paper on the Department's draft PSA 2005-06 which sets out the high level aims, objectives and targets the Department is seeking to achieve and focuses on key priorities for planned outcomes for the citizen. The Board approved the draft for

inclusion in the draft Priorities and Budget 2005 -2008 document which would shortly issued for public consultation before the finalised document is published in mid-December.

(b) Freedom Of Information Update

Mrs Angus tabled a paper which updated the Board on the Department's overall state of preparedness for the full introduction of the Freedom of Information Act on 1 January 2005. The Act will require the Department to make its information assets more accessible to the public. Mrs Angus explained that all necessary Departmental structures, including updated filing systems, were in place and further work by Information Management Unit was ongoing in respect of accessibility of information assets and confidentiality of information.

An awareness campaign at Northern Ireland Civil Service and Departmental level was currently underway and a comprehensive training programme had been identified for key staff involved in the information access decision-making process, Local Information Managers and senior managers. It was agreed that training for key staff will be mandatory and a reminder to that effect would be included in the September 2004 Departmental Brief. **Action: Corporate Services Division.**

(c) Departmental Brief

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

6. Tour de Table

There were no updates from Directors.

**7. Any Other Business
Christmas Cards**

It was agreed that the Equality Directorate and Corporate Services Division would consult on the identification of a charity or charities for a

theme for inclusion in the Department's official Christmas card for 2004.

Action: Equality Directorate and Corporate Services Division

8. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board is rescheduled from 11th to Monday 18th October 2004 in the 4th Floor Conference room, Castle Buildings.

MARK HIGGINS

15 September 2004