

**SUMMARY OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETINGS
ON 14 & 15 JUNE 2004**

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Higgins (Secretary) Mr Stewart, Mr Playfair, Mr Simpson.

APOLOGIES: None

Items 1, 2 3, 4, 5 (c) and 5(e) were covered at the 14 June meeting. Due to insufficient time, Items 5 (a), (b), (d) and (f) were covered in a reconvened meeting on 15 June 2004 with all of the above named present except for Mr Stewart, Mr Cushnahan, Mr Gray and Dr Smyth.

1. Minutes of Last Meeting

The summary of the Departmental Board meeting on 10 May 2004 was agreed as amended.

2. Matters Arising

The Departmental Submission for Budget 2004 and the Review of Staffing Priorities papers were covered in items 4(a) and 5(b) respectively.

3. Standing Items

(a) Assembly Issues

Ms Flanagan reported on the latest position in respect of the redeployment of Assembly staff and the current number of special advisers which now stood at five. Following the completion of the European Elections, negotiations with Northern Ireland's political parties had resumed with the aim of restoring the devolved administrations.

(b) Departmental Board Forward Plan

The Board approved an updated version of the plan to include Section 75 Equality Scheme as an item for the October 2004 meeting.

(c) Finance, Accountability and Risk

The above matters were dealt with previously by the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 14 June 2004.

4. Current Issues

(a) Departmental Input to Budget 2004

Mr Sweeney outlined the requirements for input to the Budget 2004 Departmental submission to DFP, which would include detail on each directorate's resource bids, priorities, options for reductions and efficiencies for Budget 2004. A final submission was agreed at a reconvened meeting of the Board on 15 June 2004.

(b) Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI)

Mr Jardine provided background information to RRI and the review of public private partnership (ppp) policy. Mr Stewart gave an update on the latest position in respect of RRI sites which included an overview of the six sites transferred to the Department and further detail in respect of the Maze site. The latter information included the approach to regeneration, the results of consultation and the next steps in the emerging options for development of the site.

(c) Single Equality Bill

Mrs Bunting gave a report on the Single Equality Bill consultation exercise being launched by Minister Spellar on 22 June 2004. Consultation documents were widely available and comprised a detailed discussion booklet, a separate summary booklet and a response booklet. The consultation exercise is scheduled to close on 12 November 2004.

5. Papers

(a) Managing Attendance

Mrs Angus tabled a paper on Managing Attendance in the Department. Mr Cushnahan complimented the paper, in particular, the emphasis it placed on the key role of line managers and the Department's strategic aim, "to proactively manage attendance and promote, maintain and improve the welfare of staff, including their physical and mental well-being". The Board noted and supported the work in hand to reduce the levels of absenteeism, the accompanying Departmental policy statement and guidance on stress in the workplace.

(b) Review of Staffing Priorities Against Budget for 2004/2005

The Board supported the paper which provided some contextual backcloth to the Board's considerations of their own Directorate and cross Departmental priorities for the 2004 -05 year. Those considerations would be set against the Budget 2004 requirement for all Departments to deliver efficiency savings and identify options for resolution.

(c) Improving Government Risk Handling

A copy of the Prime Minister's letter, Improving Risk Handling and accompanying framework document, "Early Management of the Risks to Successful Delivery" was circulated to Board members. Those documents outlined best practice in risk assessment and management to ensure policies can be successfully delivered. The Board noted the advice from Mr Hamilton and the Policy Innovation Unit to circulate the information to staff involved in policy and finance work.

(d) NIAO Report – Use of Consultants

The Board discussed the above report which recommended improvements by all Departments in complying with DFP guidance on the use of consultants. As a result of the NIAO recommendations, DFP would be producing revised guidance for Departments on the procurement of consultancy services. The Board would review the guidance as soon as it was available for discussion at a future Board meeting. It was agreed that Directors would ensure that all business cases for the procurement of consultancy services would follow current DFP guidance and be approved at Ministerial level.

(e) Service Delivery Agreement 2003-2004 Outturn Report

It was agreed that Directors would check the relevant entries in respect of their directorates and provide amendments or nil returns to Corporate Services Division before the report was issued for publication on the Department's website. **Action: Directors/ Corporate Services Division**

(f) Departmental Brief

The Board agreed a number of amendments to the June 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

No other business was discussed.

8. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Monday 9 August 2004 in the 4th Floor Conference room, Castle Buildings.

MARK HIGGINS

28 June 2004