

**SUMMARY OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING  
ON 15 DECEMBER 2004**

**PRESENT:** Mrs Angus, Ms Bunting, Mr Cushnahan, Ms Flanagan,  
Mr McConnell, Dr Smyth (Chair), Mr Sweeney.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr Higgins (Secretary), Mr Playfair, Mr Cory and Mr  
McGrath (Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland),

**APOLOGIES:** Mr Hamilton, Mr Gray, Mr Grimason, Mr McCartney.

**1. Minutes of Last Meeting**

The summary of the Departmental Board meeting on 18 November 2004 was agreed as amended.

**2. Matters Arising**

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

**3. Standing Items**

**(a) Assembly Issues**

Ms Flanagan reported on the latest position in respect of the political Review Talks.

**(b) Departmental Board Forward Plan**

The Board reviewed the plan for the period ending 14 March 2005, and included Section 75 Equality Scheme as a new item for the January Board meeting and, two new items for the February Board meeting "A Shared Future", the policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland and Freedom of Information.

**(c) Finance, Accountability and Risk**

Mr Sweeney tabled a paper on (a) Outturn Information for April–October 2004, and updates on (b) In-year September and Ad-hoc

Monitoring and (c) Budget 2004. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) are currently working to finalise the Budget 2004 with publication now planned for 20 December. Departments have provided DFP with options for reductions amounting to 1½%,but it would appear these may not be uptaken.

Detailed monitoring and accounting for efficiencies will now become an explicit part of future monitoring rounds. Departments are required to publish details of their efficiency plans in a standard format by the end of January. Work is currently underway to detail departmental efficiencies in the required form of Efficiency Technical Notes and Efficiency Development Plans. Finance Branch is working with Directorates and Budget Holders to provide this information. It was agreed that Finance Branch would instigate an additional internal monitoring exercise in January 2005 to assist in meeting DFPs requirements. **Action: Finance Branch/ Directors.**

Mrs Angus also tabled a paper on workforce planning which complimented the discussion on Budget 2004. Departments would be expected to deliver financial efficiencies and reduced workforces and progress on both would be monitored by DFP who also require Departments to provide them with the profile of reductions in posts over the next 3 years. To facilitate the preparation of Efficiency Delivery Plans and further discussion at the January 2005 Board meeting Directors agreed to provide Corporate Services by the end of December with details of planned reductions in posts. **Action: Corporate Services/ Directors.**

**(d) Freedom of Information (FOI)**

Mrs Angus reported that the mandatory FOI training programme is now complete with almost 400 staff receiving a FOI awareness presentation, including specific events to facilitate Executive Information Service and all of the departmental Press Offices.

Feedback on the presentations was very positive and the Board complimented the Local Information Managers for their contribution in helping to make the training successful.

#### **4 (a) Geographic Information Strategy for Northern Ireland**

Mick Cory, Chief Executive, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) delivered a presentation on Mosaic, the brand name for a Geographic Information (GI) Strategy for Northern Ireland which was being progressed by OSNI. Mr Cory made a similar presentation to the Permanent Secretary Group (PSG) and other Departments.

The vision of Mosaic is to provide the strategic leadership required for a practical, co-ordinated and inclusive approach to improving the collection, funding, dissemination and use of geographic information. The Board congratulated Mr Cory on his excellent presentation which demonstrated the unique and wide ranging information resource of GI and the major contribution it can make to improved service delivery. It was agreed that arrangements would be made for a similar presentation to the Central Emergency Planning Group. **Action: Corporate Services.**

It was agreed that Mosaic would also be relevant to the work of PSG sub-group D which is concerned inter alia with strategic planning and policy development and that arrangements would be made to forward the terms of reference of that group to Mr Cory. **Action: Corporate Services.**

#### **4 (b) Preparation for the OFMDFM Business Plan 2005/06**

Mrs Angus reported that preparatory work would need to begin shortly for the 2005/06 Departmental Business Plan. Guidance on the required format of Business Plans is currently being developed by Public Service Reform Unit and Central Management Unit would commission first draft inputs from Directors as soon as possible.

The Board noted that the main purpose of the Business Plan is to support the actions and targets set out for the Department in the Priorities and Budget 2005-08. It was agreed that directorates would need to begin considering their inputs ahead of publication in March 2005. **Action: Directors/ Central Management Unit.**

**5(a) Proposals for Departmental Conference**

Mrs Angus tabled a paper deferred from the November Board meeting on proposals for a Departmental staff conference. The Board agreed that a staff conference should be held in the first half of 2005 with the theme of change and the format should include parallel workshops. The Board welcomed the assistance offered by the Executive Information Service to assist with the event management. It was agreed that further work would be undertaken by Corporate Services Division and Executive Information Service to develop the event theme, programme and format and report back to the Departmental Board. **Action: Corporate Services Division/Executive Services Division.**

**5(b) OFMDFM Equality Scheme Progress Report**

Ms Bunting presented a report on the Departmental Equality Scheme which covered main issues during the second quarter. The Board noted that a more detailed six monthly report would be presented to the January meeting. Significant input to equality, good relations and NTSN assessment of draft Priorities and Budget was also noted. Three main proposals outlined in the paper were agreed. The first proposal included the publication of information on (a) the results of policies screened during the previous six months and (b) a forward look at forthcoming consultations, showing policies on which the Department intends to consult in the next six months.

The second proposal referred to all officials directly involved in the implementation of the Equality Scheme who should include reference to their role and responsibilities in Personal Performance Plans.

The third proposal highlighted the importance of giving the Statutory Duty and Human Rights Unit (SDHRU) information about screening decisions and equality impact assessments in good time, and that SDHRU's functions include offering advice, assistance and challenge to Departmental officials on statutory duty issues if required.

### **5 (c) Business Plan 2004/05 - Progress Report**

Mr Sweeney tabled a progress report on performance against commitments made in the OFMDFM Business Plan for first and second quarters of 2004-05 i.e. the period ending 30 September 2004. The Board noted the latest position in relation to the Business Plan performance targets.

### **6. Tour de Table**

There were no updates from Directors.

### **7. Any Other Business**

#### **Development of 'Critical Friend' Service**

Mr Smyth circulated a memo from PSG Sub-Committee D who were seeking to identify further opportunities to pilot the 'critical friend' service. The 'critical friend' service involves providing policy development support to Departments, which are in the lead in policy-making, and provide the type of friendly challenge function that the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit has also introduced.

The Board noted the PSG Sub-Committee D request to (a) identify policy reviews which might benefit from the 'critical friend' service, for consideration by PSG Sub-Committee D; and (b) nominate candidates for the 'pool' of 'critical friends'. It was agreed that

further information would be sought on the service from the Policy Innovation Unit and that information would be fed back to the Board. Further discussion will take place at the Board meeting on Monday 10 January 2005. **Action: Corporate Services Division/ Policy Innovation Unit.**

**8. Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Monday 10 January 2005 in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, Castle Buildings

**MARK HIGGINS**

December 2004