

**SUMMARY OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING  
ON 19 JANUARY 2005**

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Greg McConnell (chair) Dorothy Angus Mary Bunting Evelyn Cummins Alan Maitland Laurene McAlpine Denis McCartney Gerry Mulligan Alan Rogers Colm Shannon Chris Stewart Linda Wilson</b>	<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Nigel Hamilton David Finegan Rosalie Flanagan Billy Gamble George Gray Stephen Grimason Neill Jackson Stewart Johnston Bill McCluggage Peter Smyth Paul Sweeney</b>
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**In Attendance: Mark Higgins (secretary)**

**Summary of last meeting**

1. The summary of the Senior Management Group meeting held on 17 November 2004 was noted and amendments agreed. There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

**Assembly Issues**

2. Denis McCartney reported on political developments and related matters.

**Greening Government**

3. Dorothy Angus tabled a paper, also noted by the January 2005 Departmental Board, about the measures that all Departments were committed to take to review existing resource utilisation and waste management practices and adopt more sustainable approaches. The paper also outlined a number of actions the Department had implemented across a range of responsibilities and the development of a number of proposed initiatives to meet that commitment.

4. It was agreed that, to encourage good practice and full participation by all business areas, information on the Department's Greening Government actions and proposed initiatives should be disseminated to all staff by including material in the next Departmental Brief. **Action: Corporate Services Division.**

### **Tour de Table**

5. Members provided an update of current issues in their respective business areas.

**5.1** Greg McConnell provided an update on the Review of Public Administration which included plans to publish a consultation paper in March 2005, including firm proposals for health and education structures, as well as options for the reform of local government and public bodies.

**5.2** Alan Maitland updated the meeting on developments in respect of the regeneration of the former Maze Prison site.

**5.3** Chris Stewart provided an update on the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received to date and advised that further guidance had been issued by the Central FOI Unit on handling FOI requests.

**5.4** Evelyn Cummins reported that a draft consultant's report on a major technical assessment of the Crumlin Road Gaol site would be forthcoming shortly. Mrs Cummins also referred to community relations matters including ongoing work with the Department of Social Development to build partnerships and, in relation to the North Belfast Unit, a future strategy and recent senior staff changes in the Unit.

**5.5** Laurene McAlpine updated the meeting on progress with the Disability Discrimination Order In Council and advised that a Draft Order would be published for public consultation by the end of January 2005.

**5.6** Linda Wilson provided an update on the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) which introduces a new longer-term approach to planning capital investment to ensure efficient and effective delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. A draft ISNI was launched for public consultation alongside the Priorities and Budget document on 20 December 2004.

**5.7** Gerry Mulligan reported on progress on consultations on a range of areas including, the Older People Draft Strategy on Promoting Social Inclusion; Gender Equality Strategy, Disability Discrimination Order and the first phase of the New TSN, Anti Poverty Strategy which was nearing completion and which would be followed by a second more focused consultation.

**5.8** Alan Rogers reported that a Holocaust Memorial event would take place in Londonderry on 23 January 2005 and an exhibition on the subject would be displayed in Castle Buildings after the event. Mr Rogers also advised that Machinery of Government Division had organised a series of awareness seminars for Departmental staff on handling Parliamentary Questions (PQs) and further seminars would be arranged for other Departments. Mr Rogers also updated the meeting on information on the performance of Northern Ireland Departments in answering PQ's for the 2003-2004 Parliamentary Session, measured against Cabinet Office guidelines. It was agreed that Machinery of Government Division would disseminate the performance information to members. **Action: Machinery of Government Division.**

**5.9** Colm Shannon provided an update on a project, being led by Executive Information Service, which was set up to review all aspects of Government advertising and with the aim of developing a revised policy approach. An interim report will be made to the Head of the Civil Service

**5.10** Dorothy Angus thanked business areas for their returns in respect of Efficiency Technical Notes and Efficiency Delivery Plans which were now being finalised and also reported that awareness seminars had been held for Grade 7s and Local Information Managers on exemptions for FOI requests.

**5.11** Mary Bunting advised that, A Shared Future, the new policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland is at the final draft stage. The Minister, John Spellar and officials are currently engaged in a round of discussions with political parties and key stakeholders following which the policy and framework is expected to be published in late February or March 2005. Ms Bunting also advised that a Five Year Review of the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland was nearing completion.

## **Any Other Business**

### **2005 Graduate Staff Officer Intake**

- 6.** Members agreed the proposal that the Department would make a bid for two graduate Staff Officers as part of a joint bid with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### **Fit For Purpose**

- 7.** The meeting discussed the awareness events held by business areas to update their staff on Fit for Purpose. The general consensus of opinion was that staff found the events useful and informative.

### **IT Users Group**

- 8.** Dorothy Angus thanked business areas for additional nominations to the group and asked that outstanding returns be made to the IT Unit as soon as possible. **Action: SMG Members.**

### **Freedom of Information (FOI)**

- 9.** Dorothy Angus referred to a Central FOI Unit minute to Permanent Secretaries and Departmental Information Managers regarding the provision of information to Ministers and oversight by senior officials on handling FOI requests. The meeting noted the requirement that, for the time being, all decisions on FOI and Environmental Information Regulation requests must be endorsed by a member of the Senior Civil Service. It was agreed that the Central FOI Unit minute would be circulated to all business areas. **Action: Information Management Unit.**

### **Summary of Meetings**

- 10.** Alan Maitland proposed that the format of the summary of the senior management group (SMG) meetings should include the forename and surname of attendees rather than using only their formal title or status with their surname. Consideration was also being given to a similar format for the summaries of Departmental Board meetings. It was agreed that future summaries of SMG meetings would use the forename and surname of attendees. **Action: Secretary to SMG.**

### **Date of next meeting**

- 11.** The next meeting of the SMG has been re-scheduled from Wednesday 23 February to Thursday 24 February, commencing at 14.00 p.m. in the Conference Room E4.18 Castle Buildings. The SMG meeting arranged for Wednesday 23 March has also been rescheduled to

Thursday 24 March, commencing at 11.00 a.m. in the Conference Room E4.18 Castle Buildings.

- 12.** Consideration is also being given to reorganising future SMG meetings so that they do not coincide with other regular meetings and events. Details on possible future changes would be disseminated to members as soon as possible. **Action: Secretary to SMG.**

MARK HIGGINS

1 February 2005