

HCS/405/04

**MINUTES OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING ON 19 MARCH 2004 IN
ROOM GD14, STORMONT CASTLE AT 8.45 am**

Present: Clive Gowdy (Chair)
Will Haire
John Hunter
Gerry McGinn
Carol Moore
Stephen Peover
Stephen Quinn
Bruce Robinson
Paul Sweeney
Pat Toal

Apologies: Nigel Hamilton
Andrew McCormick
Aideen McGinley
David Watkins

In Attendance: Edgar Jardine } Agenda Item 2
Nigel McCormick }
Pauline Boyle (Secretary)

Paul Sweeney attended PSG to represent OFMDFM and Carol Moore represented DCAL.

1. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March would be circulated next week.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Information Access

[Edgar Jardine and Nigel McCormick joined PSG for this item].

Edgar Jardine welcomed the opportunity to introduce this item to PSG to highlight some sense of what lies ahead over the next 9 months. Freedom of

Information aims to create a culture of openness and greater transparency in government's dealings with the public at its widest ranging scope. Northern Ireland has adopted UK legislation. A lot of work has already been undertaken and some publication schemes are already in place. The right to request information comes into effect on 1 January 2005.

After in-depth discussion on various aspects of the scheme PSG:

- noted the progress on preparing for FOI and the organisational arrangements for doing so;
- agreed that training and awareness for FOI is a key priority for 2004/05 for BDS and Departments;
- endorsed SCS attendance at FOI training.

It is planned to have SCS awareness seminars in June with fuller training in November.

Nigel McCormick said electronic documents records management system (EDRMS) is key to FOI in driving efficiencies. Three lead implementers (DETI, DCAL and OFMDFM) are running a pilot project and lessons learned will be made widely available.

PSG noted the progress and developments on EDRMS and Clive Gowdy asked colleagues to take back to their Departments the significance and timescales involved. PSRU will return to PSG on this issue.

[Action: Nigel McCormick]

4. Tour de Table

Bruce Robinson reported on the announcement by Phoenix Natural Gas that a 20% increase in gas prices would come into effect on 19 March.

Stephen Quinn reported an astonishing amount of media coverage on the opening of the Toome bypass on Monday 15 March 2004.

Pat Toal reported on the Brucellosis outbreak in Cornwall.

Alan Shannon referred to the Chancellor's announcement and the reference to reduce civil service posts by 40,000.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Friday 26 March at 9.15 am in The Manor House of Greenmount Agricultural and Horticultural College. PSG agenda would be taken first and DARD will then give a presentation on CAP reform and animal health issues. A tour of the new Student Resource Centre

and the reconstructed walled garden would be given and those available to stay for lunch should let Pat Toal's office know on Extension 24608. A map of the campus will issue with the papers for the meeting and members are also asked to let Mr Toal's office have car registration numbers for security reasons.

PAULINE BOYLE

