

**MINUTES OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING  
ON 24 FEBRUARY 2005**

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

**In Attendance: Mark Higgins (secretary)**

**Minutes of last meeting**

1. The minutes of the Senior Management Group meeting held on 19 January 2005 were noted and amendments agreed. There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

**Assembly Issues**

2. Rosalie Flanagan reported on political developments and related matters.

**Absenteeism & Managing Attendance**

3. Liz Elliott provided a summary of a paper tabled by Dorothy Angus on levels of sick absence within OFMDFM including a Departmental report for 2003-04 and sickness absence statistics for October to December 2004. The meeting noted that while the Department's sickness levels are still amongst the lowest in the NICS, they have been increasing slowly. However, the increase can partly be attributed to the winter months which reflects the general trend throughout the NICS. The senior management group acknowledged the work of Personnel

Services in this area and the ongoing work at directorate level to ensure that levels of absenteeism are monitored and action is reviewed on a regular basis. The meeting noted that Directors had agreed to offer full support at Departmental level and to their line managers in taking forward a challenging programme to improve absenteeism and manage attendance.

#### **OFMDFM Table of Issues**

4. Stewart Johnston proposed that the OFMDFM Table of Issues could be utilised at Senior Management Meetings with colleagues reporting by exception on key issues and the table would then be signed off corporately for use at the next Departmental Representatives meeting. Rosalie Flanagan proposed that business areas take a fresh look at the Table of Issues and include new issues such as Freedom of Information. It was agreed to adopt the proposal of utilising the Table of Issues for future senior management meetings and that Executive Secretariat and Central Management Unit would liaise about the commissioning of returns for an updated table. **Action: Executive Secretariat and Central Management Unit.**
  
5. It was also agreed that the use of the Table of Issues would negate the need for a Tour De Table which would therefore be dispensed with at future senior management meetings.

#### **Tour de Table**

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

**6.1** Laurene McAlpine updated the meeting on the consultation on options for a single Equality Bill. The Department is currently analysing the responses received and intends to publish a report on its findings by Easter 2005. The Minister, John Spellar has indicated that

he wished to discuss the outcome of the consultation with local political parties once the analysis has been completed.

**6.2** Linda Wilson reported that a press release on the Maze Consultation Panel Final Report 2005 was planned for issue on 25 February 2005. She also reported a meeting is scheduled between the Secretary of State, his Ministerial Team and representatives of the Northern Ireland Committee, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) on 21 March for the inaugural meeting of a Bi-lateral Forum. The aim of the Forum is to provide for effective consultation between the NI Administration and the NIC-ICTU on public policy and on matters where there is a common interest.

**6.3** Bill McCluggage provided an update on a range of planned initiatives including Broadband access, the launch of Citizen E-mail, a pilot project in the Lisburn area for SMART Cards and a multi-channel contact centre strategy consultation.

**6.4** Liz Elliott reported on a successful pilot of Information Technology skills training in the Department, to prepare staff for the introduction of e-Human Resource and the Electronic Document Record Management system. The training would be offered to the rest of the Department and the senior management group agreed to encourage attendance by their staff. Mrs Elliott also advised that a total of 19 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, covering a wide range of topics, had been received since 1 January 2005.

**6.5** Neill Jackson advised that, following media speculation about forthcoming general or local government elections, Machinery of Government Division would be in a position to issue pre-election guidance to Departments on handling of events and key

announcements, during the relevant purdah period. He also reported on a forthcoming meeting of the Organised Crime Task Force.

**6.6** David Finegan provided an update on the Review of Public Administration and advised that a consultation document was due for publication in March 2005 and it would contain firm proposals for health and education structures, as well as options for the reform of local government and public bodies.

**6.7** Stewart Johnston reported on a significant increase in the number of Parliamentary Questions recently received, handling of FOI requests in respect of North South Implementation bodies and a British Irish Council summit on Transport which would be held in Belfast in November 2005.

**6.8** Rosalie Flanagan reported that Good Governance meetings which were now more structured with Departments providing specific briefing and that had provided an improved focus for Ministers on key issues.

**6.9** Gerry Mulligan reported on progress on the Older People Draft Strategy on Promoting Social Inclusion with recent meetings being held with stakeholder groups including Help the Aged and Age Concern. The strategy will be issued on 21 March 2005.

## **Any Other Business**

### **Masterclass Series**

- 7.** The Members noted the first event in the 2005 series of Masterclasses on 20 April 2005 with Sir Nicholas Montagu as guest speaker on the topic of Change Management. As the event will occur at the same time as the

April senior management meeting and was likely to attract high interest from the senior civil service it was agreed to reschedule the time of the 20 April senior management meeting from 9.30 a.m. to 14.00 p.m.

**Date of next meeting**

- 8.** It was agreed to reschedule the Wednesday 23 March meeting to Thursday 24 March, commencing at 11.00 a.m. in the Conference Room E4.18 Castle Buildings.

MARK HIGGINS

16 March 2005