

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING  
ON 27 FEBRUARY 2008**

**PRESENT:** John McMillen (Chair), Mary Bunting  
Frank Cushnahan, George Gray,  
Stephen Grimason, Jackie Kerr, Deirdre Kenny and  
Eddie Rooney.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mark Higgins (Secretary).

**APOLOGIES:** Rosalie Flanagan and Sir Nigel Hamilton.

**Introductions**

1. John McMillen introduced Eddie Rooney as Cynthia Smith's replacement and the new Director of Equality with effect from 25 February 2008 as a result of Cynthia taking up the post of Chief Executive of the Planning Service. The Chairman expressed on behalf of the Board thanks and appreciation to Cynthia Smith for her invaluable input to the work of the Board and as Director of Equality.

**Minutes of Previous Meetings**

2. The minutes of the Departmental Board meetings held on 19.12.07 and 10.1.08 were agreed as amended.

**Matters Arising**

3. Outstanding action points arising from previous meetings were discussed and amendments agreed. An updated action points table would be completed and issued with the draft minutes of the 27 February 2008 meeting. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

## **Sustainable Development**

4. Alan Maitland tabled a proposed Sustainable Development action plan for 2008 which it was agreed at a previous Board meeting would be submitted for the Board's approval. Alan explained that the plan includes 5 commitments with supporting detail on the proposed action to meet the commitments, i.e. what will be done and how it will be done with benefits, costs and timing for each supporting action.
5. The Board discussed the five broad areas covered by the commitments which addressed the Department's social policy to sustainable development including actively promoting the goal of sustainable development and applying its principle, changes in working practices to use less paper and ink, to only use the supplies needed and procure sustainably, use energy sparingly and improve waste management.
6. It was agreed that Alan Maitland would take on board the comments of members for the various proposed commitments and take those back to the Sustainable Development working group to consider. It was also agreed that the proposal to review the use of personal printers with the aim of grouping printers into a multi-user network would be piloted in the Equality Directorate to test the viability of that proposal.

## **Hospitality**

7. Deirdre Kenny tabled a paper on hospitality as agreed at the Board's December 2007 meeting. The Board were asked to consider if it is satisfied that the current guidance remains

appropriate and if it wishes to publish information on hospitality received by OFMDFM Board members along the lines of what is proposed for GB Departments.

8. There was general discussion about the amount of detail provided on hospitality received by Board members and John McMillen emphasised the need for openness and transparency.
9. It was agreed that aspects of the Cabinet Office guidance would be adopted in the Department's guidance which should be reviewed and tabled for the June 2008 Departmental Board. It was also agreed that the final guidance should be placed on the Department's website and disseminated to the Department's sponsored bodies with recommendation that they adopt it.

**Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

### **RecordsNI**

10. The Board noted a paper from Departmental Information Manager, Ciaran Murphy, which provided an update on OFMDFM's Records NI project which will implement an Electronic Documents and Records Management System, known as TRIM, across the Department. Deirdre Kenny explained that in OFMDFM stage two of a two stage implementation process would commence on 18 February 2008 and is due to be completed by the end of March. Mrs Kenny reported that there was a very good attendance for the mandatory TRIM training and that Desk Side Support will be available for staff after their training.

11. The Board noted and endorsed the proposed approach detailed in Ciaran Murphy's paper which advised that the departmental File Plan has been completed, TRIM will eventually replace the Document Library, detailed guidance on the application of access controls will issue to staff and a variety of policies and procedures documents have been developed by the IMU. Mrs Kenny advised that with the introduction of TRIM, the official record of government business will change from 'paper' to 'electronic with some exceptions and some important housekeeping issues will need to be addressed, including the management of email accounts, the management of existing electronic documents, and the development of retention and disposal schedules. The Board paid tribute to the work of the Information Management Unit in the central role it has played in the rollout of Records NI project in the Department.

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

12. The Board noted a quarterly report from Ciaran Murphy which provided a statistical breakdown of various key features of FOI requests for information received during the calendar years 2005, 2006 and 2007 and which demonstrated the performance achieved by the Department in response. The paper highlighted the significant increase in the number of FOI requests received by the Department which has been particularly marked since the restoration of devolution in May 2007.

### **Review of Capacity and Structures in OFMDFM**

13. The Board discussed the ongoing work of the Efficiency Group and the work by directors to identify potential efficiency savings.

It was agreed that a special meeting of the Board would be held within the week to address key issues from the review of structures and functions. **Action: Board Secretary.**

### **Executive Business**

14. John McMillen thanked those business areas involved in producing a First Day Brief for the incoming Junior First Minister, Jeffrey Donaldson. No other Executive Business was discussed.

### **Business Planning**

15. As previously agreed the Board focused on a specific session with the aim of finalising and agreeing the Business Plan for 2008-09, agreeing on the format and structure for its communication to staff and others; and consider risk management issues associated with the Business Plan. It was agreed that final comments on the 2008-09 Business Plan should be submitted to Deirdre Kenny within the aim of submitting a final draft to Ministers shortly afterwards. Risk assessments against the approved 2008-08 Business Plan and supporting Balanced Scorecard would be conducted by Directors for their business areas, to develop a new Corporate Risk Register for 2008-09 and beyond. Progress to date on the 2008-09 Business Plan and Balanced Scorecard would be included in a session at the 3 March 2008 Departmental staff conference.

### **Forward Plan**

16. The Board noted the updated Plan as a result of inputs received from Directors.

## **Resource Planning**

17. A joint paper tabled by Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr showed that the Department's Fit for Purpose target has been achieved and that Departments are moving now from the Fit for Purpose exercise into Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. The Board noted the administration reserve and resource reserve position after February monitoring for 2007-08 which was estimated at £0.192 million and £0.2 million, respectively.

## **Financial Reporting**

18. The Board noted and discussed a range of financial reports tabled by the Director of Finance, Jackie Kerr. The reports included summary financial outturn information to the 31.1.08 including variance analysis performance to date, summary Departmental Reserve levels, summary February 2008 Monitoring Round Proposals, AccountNI Customer Survey Results to date, an update on 2008-11 Budget allocations, an update on 2008-09 Profiled Budgets and an update on Prompt Payment performance monitoring.
19. The outturn figures indicate a significant improvement in budget management in-year but Mrs Kerr advised that account must also be taken of the level of reduced requirements declared in-year, as easements also represent an underspend against budget. The Board focused on key issues highlighted in reduced requirements declared by directorates at each of the 4 in-year monitoring exercises. Jackie Kerr advised that she will be doing

- further analysis on the factors giving rise to these reduced requirements and will report back to the Board on this issue.
20. The Board noted a review by Iain McFarlane, Finance Division on the Resource Accounting requirements in handling longer term liabilities including, specific liabilities within Departments and liabilities of non-Departmental Public Bodies which could fall on the Department in future should circumstances so arise. The review included an examination of the Memorandum of Understanding of the Department's sponsored bodies to identify the potential for any future liability to be passed on to the Department and including obtaining relevant assurances from the Department's sponsor divisions regarding their controls to identify and manage any possible liabilities. It was agreed the outcome of the review would be addressed by the Board's finance sub-committee and the Audit Committees at the next meeting of both Committees.
  21. Jackie Kerr reported that due to issues outside the control of Finance Division it was not possible to present a set of 9 month interim accounts, to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007, to the February Board to meet the commitment to prepare quarterly interim accounts and as a dry run for the year end accounts. It was hoped to present accounts to the March 2008 Board.
  22. Mrs Kerr explained that the main reasons for the delay were concerned with the new AccountNI (ACNI) system, including delays in implementation of ACNI, underdeveloped reporting solution within the ACNI project, problems around the fixed

asset software package and ACNI procedures and resolution of queries. The Board noted those major difficulties and agreed that their concerns should be raised formally by the Accounting Officer with DFP. **Action: John McMillen**

### **Managing Attendance**

23. The Board discussed a submission from Sir Nigel Hamilton to Ministers which summarised the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter report for 2007/2008 on Managing Attendance which showed (for each month) the overall absence rate for the Northern Ireland Civil Service and OFMDFM. The Board discussed the report, noted that OFMDFM consistently has a lower absence rate than the NICS average, but recognised the importance of keeping a sharp focus on managing attendance, particularly as the Department's target performance measure for the 2007/2008 financial year of 9.2 days absence per member of staff is unlikely to be met.

### **Maze/ Long Kesh**

24. Alan Maitland provided an update on the current position regarding the Maze / Long Kesh site and it was agreed that a separate Departmental Board meeting would be arranged shortly to discuss this matter with the Regeneration Sites Team. **Action: Board Secretary.**

### **Business Change Programme**

26. The Board noted an updated report which summarised the various priority 1 reform projects within the Business Change Programme.

### **Departmental Brief**

27. The Board approved the February Departmental Brief which would be issued to Directors to instigate the team briefing process in the Department. **Action: Board Secretary.** Concern was expressed that the team brief process was not being instigated in all business areas. It was noted that team briefing was being addressed by the working group set up to develop a Corporate Development Programme for the Department through identified themes including communication.

### **Any Other Business**

#### **Audit Committee Meeting**

28. Frank Cushnahan provided a summary of the matters discussed at the previous 19.12.07 Audit Committee meeting which he had not had the opportunity to verbally report on because of the cancellation of the January 2008 Board meeting. Mr Cushnahan advised that the December 2007 Committee meeting was attended by Stephanie Lowry and Noel Lavery as the new members of the re-structured Audit Committee. The key issues the Committee discussed included its terms of reference, the Internal Audit Interim Report and the corporate risk register. Mr Cushnahan advised that he had since met with Stephanie Lowry and Noel Lavery and he would provide the Audit Committee attendees with a synopsis of the main items discussed at that meeting

#### **Selection Process**

29. John McMillen provided copies of Civil Service Commissioners (CSC) papers on the recently competed Selection Processes

Audit undertaken on behalf of the CSC. The overall aim of the audit was to examine, and provide Commissioners with an understanding of, the selection processes deployed by the NICS, Derek Baker, DFP, is considering the auditors' recommendations and advises Commissioners of what further action is necessary in order to address these centrally on behalf of the NICS. It was agreed to circulate the CSC papers and audit report to Directors for their information. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

### **Victims Commissioners**

30. Eddie Rooney provided an update on the recent appointment of four Victims Commissioners and it was agreed he would meet with George Gray to discuss legislative programme matters in that area.

### **Departmental Staff Conference**

31. The Board noted the latest registration figures for the 3 March 2008 staff conference and Directors were asked to encourage staff who had not yet registered to do so as soon as possible to ensure a good attendance at the event.

### **Review of Meeting**

32. The general consensus was that there was a good focus on priority and strategic issues and the meeting addressed matters of substance. Members were reminded of the agreement not to use blackberries during the meeting.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

33. The next Board meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday 9 April 2008 following postponement of the 27 March 2008 meeting. The venue would be notified to members.

**Mark Higgins**

20 March 2008