

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 28 AUGUST 2008**

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Higgins (Secretary).

APOLOGIES: None.

Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 18.6.08 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

2. Updates to outstanding action points from previous meetings and recorded on the Action Points table were agreed. The Board discussed the action point which referred to the need to address immediate and long term staffing requirements in the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC). It was agreed that action to address this issue and attract the required level of professional skills for OLC should be escalated as a matter of urgency and progress reported to the September Board meeting. Bruce Robinson said that corresponding action had been taken for other professional groups and asked that this be referenced as part of this exercise **Action: Deirdre Kenny**
3. An updated table would be completed and issued with the draft minutes of the 28 August 2008 meeting.

Executive Business

4. Rosalie Flanagan reported that Peter King had recently been appointed as an adviser to the First Minister. Bruce Robinson requested that an update on the appointment of advisers be provided to staff as soon as possible, with information on the allocation of areas of work to advisers following when it was available; it was agreed that Deirdre Kenny would provide that information. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

5. Rosalie also reported on recent Assembly senior appointments including , Trevor Reaney the new Clerk/Director General to the Assembly, five new Assembly Directors and a new OFMDFM Committee Clerk, Cathy White who replaced Damien Martin. It was agreed to include details of the appointments in the Departmental Brief. The Board also agreed with Rosalie Flanagan's proposal to re-issue the June 2008, "Guidance on Working With The Private Office" to staff by placing it in the Document Library and highlighting that action in the latest Departmental Brief. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

OFMDFM Annual Report to Equality Commission.

6. Eddie Rooney tabled the above draft report on implementation of the equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order. The report was tabled to agree that, subject to any further input from Departmental Board colleagues, it will be forwarded to Ministers and the Departmental Committee for information

before submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) by 30 September 2008.

7. Eddie Rooney noted George Gray's point about an apparent lack of reference in the report to the Department's Equality Scheme. Mr Rooney requested that members provide final comments to him on the 2007-08 report as soon as possible.

8. The Board noted ECNI's recommendations in respect of the Review of Effectiveness of Section 75 and the implications this may have for policy makers, resources and future Section 75 Annual Reports. The Board's discussion focused on two of ECNI's recommendations, firstly its emphasis for 2008-09 and beyond from reporting on processes, as at present, to measuring outcomes and introducing in-year monitoring in all policy areas. Secondly ECNI's recommendation to change the equality impact assessment process by undertaking new compliance audit work within its remit and increasing its expectations in terms of the evidence it expects all public authorities to demonstrate in carrying out their statutory duties. It was agreed that Eddie Rooney would seek further clarification from ECNI on their recommendations for 2008-09 and beyond and he would report back to the Board. **Action: Eddie Rooney.**

Corporate Performance Report

9. The Corporate Performance Report (CPR) which was initially discussed at the Board's 19.8.08 strategic planning day was reviewed in detail with the focus on reporting by Directors, for their business areas, on key performance information for quarter ending June 2008. The main areas covered included

exception reporting on variances for resource and capital expenditure against the budget profile and progress reporting on performance against Public Service Agreement (PSA) objectives, 2008-09 business plan targets and corporate risks.

10. The Board agreed a way forward for those PSA targets that were highlighted in the report as being unlikely to be achieved by the original target date.

11. The Board reviewed the Corporate Risk Register in detail and it was agreed that there should be one single owner for each Risk, rather than responsibility being shared or split as is the case for some risks, at present. It was also agreed that the Audit Committee would review the Corporate Risk Register at its meeting on 8.10.08 and report the outcome of that review to the following Departmental Board meeting for action.
Action: Frank Cushnahan.

12. The Board considered the financial outturn against the profiled budget as reported by exception for those business areas that had a variance over 1.5% for the period ending 30 June 2008. Jackie Kerr advised that the overall financial position in-year was difficult with Department facing a significant administration budget shortfall. The Board agreed therefore that management of vacancies would continue to be essential and current or forthcoming vacancies would not now be filled in all but exceptional circumstances. The situation would be reviewed at the end of October and the Accounting Officer would issue a formal notification to members. **Action: John McMillen.**

13. Bruce Robinson advised that financial management must continue to be high on the agenda for Directorates' senior management meetings. Mr Robinson noted that the quality of information in this first CPR was good and it was agreed that it should be the main Departmental monitoring mechanism and system for a wide range of high level performance indicators and so would negate the need to commission separate monitoring exercises for key performance indicators.

14. The Board reviewed other key performance information in the CPR including Freedom of Information (FOI), absence management, training and Executive business . It was agreed that more detailed information on attendance/absence rates and training (including an analysis of non-attendance) would be useful by providing a breakdown by Directorate. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.** It was also agreed to review the format and content of the Section 4 of the CPR which reported on Executive papers so that the focus of the monitoring would be on how the Department services or provides support to the Executive. **Action: Rosalie Flanagan.**

Corporate /Business Planning 2009-10

15. The Board considered the approach to business planning for 2009/10 in light of the proposed next steps that were discussed at the Board's strategic planning day. It was agreed that as a starting point Directors would produce high level objectives, for their business areas, against the balanced scorecard quadrants with the emphasis on the results quadrant. **Action: Directors.**

16. Advisers would be invited to a second Board planning day, to be held in 6 to 8 weeks time to review Directors' objectives

and take forward the framework for the 2009-10 Business Plan. Directors would advise Deirdre Kenny and the Board secretary when they had completed that initial work so that a definite date could be chosen for the second planning day.

Action: Directors/Mark Higgins.

DFP Memorandum of Reply to NI Assembly Reports

17. The Board noted the above memorandum of reply (MOR) which highlighted a recent PAC report and MOR on Good Governance – Effective Relationships between Departments and their Arms Length Bodies.

Business Change Programme: Highlight Report

18. The Board discussed the monthly report on the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme. For AccountNI Jackie Kerr advised that there was a need for business areas to make more use of the procurement modules and there was concern about the interface between HRConnect and AccountNI in the context of transactions and with the reporting capability of AccountNI. It was agreed that Jackie Kerr would report regularly to the Board on the usage of the procurement module by business areas. Consideration would also be given to inviting representatives from Finance Division and AccountNI to a Board meeting later in the year to update members on issues and progress with that reform project. **Action: Jackie Kerr.**

19. Deirdre Kenny reported that log-on rates for HRConnect were good but that particularly for senior grades, the rates needed to improve.

20. For the RecordsNI reform project it was agreed that an editorial examination should be undertaken on what has been created on TRIM and so provide reassurance that unnecessary duplication has been avoided. The Board would be provided with a paper on the outcome of that exercise. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**
21. Bruce Robinson proposed and the Board concurred that it is essential to identify best practice in implementing the reform projects and disseminate that to staff, for example in the Departmental Brief. This approach would help create "natural champions" for the reform programme and to determine if the systems are being used as intended. An update on RecordsNI would be included in future Highlight Reports and they would include statistical information where possible on log on rates, quantification of documents on the "TRIM" system and staff training take-up. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**
22. It was also agreed to provide a paper to the September Board on the Lotus Notes applications in use in OFMDFM and, separately across the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including those applications that may be run down and not replaced, those that need to be replaced and the timetable for replacing them. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

Departmental Brief

- 23.** The Board approved the September Departmental Brief with the addition of the material outlined at paragraph 5 above. The amended version would be issued to Directors to instigate the team briefing process in the Department. **Action: Board**

Secretary. It was noted that the Departmental Brief would now be issued monthly. It was also noted that a communications sub-group of the working group set up in January 2008 to develop a Corporate Development Programme was considering the team briefing process as part of its work.

Forward Plan

24. The Board noted an updated Forward Plan which would be issued to members for further update when agenda items are commissioned for the September Board meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Chief Executives Forum

25. John McMillen reported on new arrangements for Departmental contributions to the Chief Executives' Forum. He explained that in the past OFMDFM paid block membership fees for Northern Ireland Departments but from 1 April 2008 the Forum has accepted new arrangements whereby each Department will pay its own membership contributions. The OFMDFM contribution of £1,340 will be paid in full.
26. Mr McMillen also explained that a new associate membership has been introduced for senior officials, at Grade 5 level and above who must be nominated by their Permanent Secretary. Associate membership is free. Bruce Robinson has recommended that all of the Department's Grade 3's and 5's are nominated for associate membership and they will be contacted shortly with details of that arrangement.

Investors in People (IiP)

27. Deirdre Kenny advised that corporate IiP accreditation is planned for early/mid 2009. As individual business areas had achieved IiP accreditation in their own right a decision was required on whether IiP accreditation for individual business areas should be allowed to lapse to accommodate the corporate application. It was agreed that the way forward will be examined by the sub-group responsible for the corporate development programme and reported to the October 2008 Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny**

Date of Next Meeting

28. The next meeting was arranged for Thursday 25.9.08 at 10.00 a.m. in the Glass House Stormont Castle. A light lunch will be provided.

Mark Higgins

4.9.08