

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 26 JULY 2007**

PRESENT: Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan, Deirdre Kenny,
John McMillen, Paul Priestly and Cynthia Smith.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Higgins (Secretary) and Simon Parker (CPCR,
Consultant).

APOLOGIES: George Gray, Stephen Grimason and Jackie Kerr.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2007 were agreed as amended.

MATTERS ARISING

Action Points

2. Members provided updates to the current Action Points table for outstanding action points arising from previous meetings. The Board noted with concern that there were an unacceptable number of staff annual reports still outstanding for the 2006-07 reporting year and it was agreed that Directors should ensure that any outstanding reports for their business area are completed and forwarded to Personnel by 20 August at the latest. **Action: Directors.** An updated Action Points table would be issued with the minutes of the 26.7.07 meeting. **Action: Board Secretary.**

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly/ Restoration Issues

3. Rosalie Flanagan reported that eight Executive meetings had taken place since restoration and two additional meetings were also held to address the recent local flooding issues. The British Irish Council and the North South Ministerial Council held their first, very successful meetings, and both meetings received positive media coverage. OFMDFM officials had received very positive feedback from key participants on the organisational arrangements for both meetings.

4. Rosalie Flanagan also reported on a successful meeting of several Board members and key OFMDFM Special Advisers, on 26th July, which focused on joint working and processes in respect of policies and priorities, the OFMDFM Committee, and Assembly matters. Participants agreed that similar regular meetings would continue between relevant officials and Special Advisers to assist in achieving effective consultation and joint working on key policies and priorities.

5. Nigel Hamilton emphasised that the last few months had been an intensive period for everyone and stated that he wished to record his appreciation and thanks to all staff for their support in helping to ensure a successful transition to a devolved administration.

Forward Plan

6. The Board agreed additional items for the Forward Plan and an amended copy would be issued with the request to members for

agenda items for the 30 August Board meeting. It was noted that Board meetings for September to December may need to be re-scheduled because Executive meetings have been arranged for the same dates. The Board secretary would notify members of any changes. **Action: Board Secretary.**

Resource Planning

7. The Board noted a joint paper from Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr which summarised the current position for the Department's Fit for Purpose target, set by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), and the 2007-08 administration budget and resource reserve. The Board noted the action required by relevant directorates before 1st September 2007 to finalise re-deployment arrangements for eight posts, and to notify Personnel of those individual posts previously identified for reduction.

8. The Board also noted that account would need to be taken of any new priorities set by Ministers and of the need to find an additional 1.5 full time equivalents to achieve the Fit for Purpose target. It was noted that other opportunities existed to address shortfalls in staff resources including the use of interchange opportunities. Cynthia Smith advised that working with outside bodies might provide another source of staff resources by involving their staff in specific tasks within Departmental business areas, with no additional cost to the Department.

9. The Board also noted the current difficult administration budget position for 2007-08 and, taking account of pressures arising from Restoration and other areas, a shortfall in the administration budget is likely which would require re-assurance on funding support. John McMillen explained that all indications where that in-year the financial position is extremely tight for the Departments, with an estimated OFMDFM administration deficit of approximately of £1.6 million and resource budget deficit of approximately £0.22 million.

Financial Reports

10. Jackie Kerr's paper on financial outturn up to and including May 2007 showed that, against profiled budget for administration, resource and capital expenditure, no variances are giving rise for concern at this early stage of the year.
11. The Board noted that OFMDFM's prompt payment performance for the month of June was 93% against a target of 95%. Average performance for the year to date is 89% which is 5% lower than the year to date performance for the May 2006 average. It was agreed that John McMillen and Jackie Kerr would examine current prompt payment performance and report to the August 2007 Board meeting. **Action: John McMillen and Jackie Kerr.**
12. John McMillen reported that no suspected fraud cases had been notified to him recently and that the Department's fraud policy

and response plan is undergoing further refinement with the introduction of a quarterly monitoring system.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

13. Deirdre Kenny's paper provided a quarterly report on FOI requests and advised the Board that OFMDFM performance continued to be good and is continuing to meet statutory deadlines for responding to FOI requests. However Mrs Kenny emphasised that there is a need to ensure that sufficient expertise is being developed in business areas for handling and processing FOI cases. Mrs Kenny advised that business areas need to engage much earlier with the Information Management Unit. Ideally this should be as early as possible and at the latest by the 10th day in terms of the 20 day deadline for FOI responses.

14. It was agreed to instigate a project to review the processes and systems for handling FOI requests and identify problem areas. The project should involve the Central FOI Unit and take account of relevant recommendations on dealing with FOI requests emanating from the recently published Scott Review. Consideration would be given to appropriate staff resources to undertake the project, other than the Information Management Unit. **Action: John McMillen and Deirdre Kenny.**

15. Nigel Hamilton also advised that he would place FOI on the agenda for a future Permanent Secretaries Group meeting to discuss wider FOI issues.

Managing Attendance

16. Deirdre Kenny reported that the latest absenteeism figures for the Department for May 2007 was 3.7% which continued to be one of the lowest in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). The Board discussed sickness absence in the context of a Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) paper submitted to the 19 July 2007 Executive meeting, on Managing Sickness Absence in the NICS. It was agreed that Directors should remind their line managers of their key role in managing sick absence with due regard to duty of care to staff

Gifts and Hospitality

17. Nigel Hamilton advised that Frank Cushnahan had reviewed his personal register of gifts and hospitality, at Mr Hamilton's request, to provide an objective assessment of the Department's compliance with Departmental and NICS-wide policy. Mr Cushnahan reported that the register showed full compliance and exceptional standards of protocol. Mr Hamilton reported the same, full compliance with the Registers kept by senior colleagues. The Board discussed the arrangements for OFMDFM corporate gifts and it was agreed that Deirdre Kenny would examine current procedures and report to the August 2007 Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

Strategic Planning Session

18. John McMillen provided an outline of the programme for the planning day and advised that the key focus would be on the purpose of OFMDFM, high level targets and performance indicators and the effectiveness of the Board. Mr McMillen

advised that Special Advisers had been invited to attend. CPCR consultant, Simon Parker, who would facilitate the day, explained that he was in the process of conducting individual interviews with all Board members before the planning session. He explained that those interviews would inform further discussion on the Board's strategy and the activities of Directors on the Departmental Board.

Risk Management Plan

19. Paul Priestly reported that he had circulated draft OFMDFM Risk Management Plans to Board members on 2 July 2007 for their comments. Board members had been asked to comment on two draft documents. The first is a revised Corporate Risk Register for 2007-08, which identifies twelve high level risks which could impact on various aspects of the work of the Department, including many not covered by the Operational Plan.
20. The second is a Risk Management Plan for 2007-08 which takes the high level risks identified in the Risk Register and relates them to the achievement of objectives and targets as set out in the Operational Plan. Paul Priestly proposed that individual Directors report on these risks as necessary, to the Board, on progress against the objectives and targets for which they are responsible in the Operational Plan. The Board agreed that risk management should be included on the agenda for all Board meetings and included in the Board's Forward Plan. **Action: Board Secretary.**

21. The Board approved the draft Risk Management Plan for 2007-08 and revised Corporate Risk Register for 2007-08, and noted that as live documents they are subject to change. Mr Cushnahan advised that corporate risks are tabled at all Audit Committee meetings for the Committee to review individual risks and make recommendations to the Departmental Board if changes were considered necessary. It was agreed that the revised Corporate Risk Register would be included on the agenda of the August 2007 Board meeting with the purpose of the Board to collectively (a) agree on the assessment of the 'impact' and 'likelihood' of each of the high level risks; (b) review the action already taken to manage risks; and (c) identify any additional actions that are required to manage the individual risks. **Action: Board Members.**

Operational Plan

22. Deirdre Kenny tabled a quarterly progress report on the expected outcomes/outputs contained in the Operational Plan for 2007-08. Mrs Kenny explained that the report included a performance framework which was compiled from updates received from Directors on the current status of targets for their business areas.
23. The Board noted that performance was more or less on track and that quarterly reports would be provided to the Board. Additional targets with supporting outcomes/outputs would be submitted by the Equality Directorate for inclusion in the Operational Plan.

Business Change Programme

24. Deirdre Kenny tabled a report which summarised the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme. The key point to note was in respect of the Workplace 2010 project and a delay in the formation of a formal implementation project board until the procurement is complete.

Any Other Business

Team Briefing

25. Paul Priestly proposed that consideration is given to reviewing the team briefing process to assist further improvements to internal communications within the Department. It was agreed that Paul Priestly would initiate a project to review the team briefing process. **Action: Paul Priestly**

Date of Next Meeting

26. The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for 10.45 a.m. on Thursday, 30 August 2007 in the Glass House, Stormont Castle.

Mark Higgins

8 August 2007