

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2005**

- PRESENT:** Nigel Hamilton (Chair for Items 1 to 3(c) & 4), Mary Bunting, Frank Cushnahan, George Gray Stephen Grimason, Jackie Kerr, Greg McConnell (Chair for Item 5 and A.O.B.), Peter Smyth and Paul Sweeney.
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Nicky Brady, Evelyn Cummins, Mark Higgins (Secretary) and Aubrey Playfair.
- APOLOGIES:** Rosalie Flanagan and Denis McCartney.

Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 2005 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

2. A report on financial outturn and lessons learned for the 2004/05 financial year was dealt with under item 3 (c).

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly Issues

3. Stephen Grimason provided an outline on the latest position in respect of the political situation.

Departmental Board Forward Plan

4. The Board agreed to Rosalie Flanagan's proposal to amend the formatting of the plan so that previous months would be deleted and forthcoming months added to provide a 12 month cycle of scheduled items. **Action: Central Management Unit.**

Finance and Accountability

5. Jackie Kerr tabled a paper on financial outturn information detailing expenditure by Directorate for April to July 2005, details of a September monitoring exercise and an outline of the Departments submission to the Department of Finance and Personnel on the draft Priorities and Budget 2005 document. The paper also reported on the Department's prompt payment performance for the financial year to August 2005 and Finance Branch resources. The Board noted that the financial environment remains very tight for any potential forthcoming bids and the emphasis is on identifying reduced requirements. The Board also noted Finance Branch vacancies and the improvement in the Department's prompt payment performance which showed 92% of payments being made within the mandatory 30 day deadline but that further improvement would be needed to meet the 95% target.

6. Jackie Kerr also tabled a paper on lessons learned for the final outturn position for OFMDFM for the 2004/05 financial year and reported that an excess vote had occurred in the notional cost element of the administration cost limit for that year. The paper outlined underspends and proposed actions that could be taken to avoid or minimise underspend situations occurring in the future. The Board agreed that careful management of those costs would be required by budget holders in a difficult financial climate.

7. The Board discussed the monitoring and control arrangements operated in relation to EU Peace II programme funding. It was agreed that Jackie Kerr should liaise with DFP regarding a possible review of the current monitoring and reporting structures in place for EU funding programmes. **Action: Jackie Kerr.**

8. Nicky Brady provided an update on the audit of the 2004/05 Resource Accounts and lessons learned from the preparation of the accounts. The Board noted the key recommendations emanating from the lessons learned exercise which included:
 - the need for all cost centres to internally monitor their spend;
 - the development of a reporting structure and key point of contact to aid and improve communication throughout branches;
 - the need for business areas to inform Personnel of all staffing movements;
 - the completion of up to date records on the location of fixed assets as soon as possible; and
 - training on a range of issues including, monitoring of spend, profiling and managing budgets and Fixed Asset management.

9. It was agreed that the Board would receive a six monthly progress report on implementation of the lessons learned recommendations. **Action: Finance Division**

Freedom of Information Update

10. Mark Higgins provided an update on FOI issues including the number and type of requests received in the Department from 1 January to 16 September 2005. The Board noted a good level of performance in dealing with all requests within best practice guidelines.

North Belfast Community Action Unit

11. Evelyn Cummins updated the meeting on the transfer of the Unit to the Department of Social Development with the Department retaining responsibility for corporate services. The change was aimed at providing better cohesion and collaboration between both Departments and facilitating the expansion of the Unit's role, including a joint master plan approach to the re-development of Girdwood Army barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol. An evaluation and review of the Unit's work would be undertaken in the near future.

Tour De Table

12. Mary Bunting thanked Directors for their responses to a paper on a review of staffing resources for the Children and Young People's Unit (C&YPU) as a consequence of additional responsibilities for the Unit in supporting the new Minister for Children. As a result of the broad agreement of the Board to the

- paper a request for additional staffing resources for the C&YPU would be made to Personnel and that staffing position would be reviewed in one year's time. An update was also provided on a Victims Commissioner and on bilateral discussions with Departments on the strategy, "A Shared Future".
13. Paul Sweeney advised that Dorothy Angus had transferred to the Department of Education and as a result Chris Stewart would have temporary responsibility for Corporate Services with effect from 3 October 2005 and retain his current responsibilities for Public Service Reform Unit. Mr Sweeney also provided an update on the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and progress on advertising the post of Head of the Northern Ireland Executive, Brussels which would be vacant in the near future.
 14. Greg McConnell provided an update on further progress on the Review of Public Administration including final conclusions on the way forward.
 15. Peter Smyth reported on progress with an accommodation project for the North/South Joint Secretariat and advised that the project Board had commissioned independent consultants to complete a business case to evaluate options for the way forward.

Any Other Business

Audit & Risk Management Committee (A&RMC) Review

16. The Board approved a revised terms of reference for the A&RMC compiled by Jackie Kerr including new arrangements for the

DB 2/10/05

Committee including separate Board and A&RMC meetings and a smaller A&RMC membership.

2005 Christmas Card

17. The Board agreed that nominations for a charity or charities to be included for the Department's 2005 Christmas Card would be sent to the secretary to the Board as soon as possible and the chosen option cleared with Mr Hamilton.

Date of Next Meeting

18. The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 11 October 2005 in the 5th Floor Conference Room, E5.27, Castle Buildings.

Mark Higgins

4 October 2005