

**MINUTES OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING
ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2005
IN ROOM E4.02 CASTLE BUILDINGS**

Present:	Nigel Hamilton (Chair) Mary Bunting Billy Gamble Stephen Grimason Neill Jackson Stewart Johnston Alan Maitland Bill McCluggage Laurene McAlpine Gerry Mulligan Colm Shannon Chris Stewart Linda Wilson	Apologies:	Evelyn Cummins David Finegan Rosalie Flanagan George Gray Jackie Kerr Denis McCartney Greg McConnell Peter Smyth Paul Sweeney
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In Attendance: Mark Higgins (secretary) Aubrey Playfair and Caroline Webb.

Minutes of Last Meeting/ Matters Arising

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

Assembly Issues

2. Stewart Johnston reported on political matters including: a forthcoming report by the Independent Monitoring Commission on De-commissioning, expected in October; de-rating of community halls; some initial work on plans to hold a series of briefings for Members of the Legislative Assembly on a range of topics; North/ South matters; and a possible meeting of the British/ Irish Inter-Governmental Conference in mid- October.

Priorities and Budget 2005/ October Monitoring

3. Aubrey Playfair advised that the financial environment remains very tight for any potential forthcoming bids and that the emphasis for the draft Priorities and Budget 2005 – 2008 is on identifying and accepting the vast majority of options for reductions and reduced requirements. Mr Hamilton emphasised that careful management of costs would be required by budget holders in a difficult financial climate.

4. Mr Playfair advised that monthly profiling of expenditure would be undertaken by Finance Division for all budget holder areas. Mr Hamilton emphasised the need to examine profiles over a number of years to identify expenditure trends.

Audit of 2004/05 Resources Accounts & Lessons Learned

5. Aubrey Playfair provided a verbal update on the key issues emerging from audit of the 2004/2005 Resource Accounts and advised that a recent presentation from Nicky Brady, Finance Division to the Departmental Board highlighted the main lessons to learn from the preparation of the accounts. The key lessons included the need for additional training and greater understanding of financial matters for all staff involved in that work, improved information on accruals and prepayments, new processes for pay reconciliation and improved systems for asset management.

6. Mr Playfair also advised that HMM Treasury requirements for faster closing of departmental resource accounts in the current

and future financial years, in the case of OFMDFM from 17 weeks to 7 weeks by 2007-08, would place greater emphasis on the need for improved financial skills and competence. Mr Hamilton advised that financial matters would be a standing item at Audit Committee meetings.

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

7. Linda Wilson provided an update on the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and explained that the Strategic Investment Board is finalising the strategy, taking into account responses from the public consultation, for consideration by Ministers. The draft Strategy sets out a medium-term (10 years) view of the infrastructure investment plans of the Northern Ireland Departments reflecting the Government's priorities across the whole range of public services.

OFMDFM Table of Issues

8. An updated Table of Issues, which lists progress on key policy areas for the Department, was provided to the meeting. The meeting discussed a range of key issues including: Freedom of Information appeal cases; possible topics for proposed briefing of Members of the Legislative Assembly; performance in handling Parliamentary Questions; guidance and instructions from Machinery of Government Division on the legislative programme; proposals for new advertising protocols, as recommended by the Government Review of Advertising; and an update on the development of a regeneration framework by an expert team of master planners for the Maze site based on recommendations made by the Maze Consultation Panel.

Any Other Business

9. Members did not raise any other business.

Date of next meeting

10. The next meeting of the senior management group is scheduled for Thursday 15 December 2005, commencing at 9.30 a.m. in the Conference Room E4.02 Castle Buildings. At the time of writing a revised date is being considered.

MARK HIGGINS