

**SUMMARY OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING
ON 26 OCTOBER 2004**

PRESENT:	Mr Hamilton (chair) Mrs Angus Ms Bunting Mrs Cummins Mr Finegan Ms Flanagan Mr Grimason Mr Jackson Mr Johnston Mr McCartney Mr McCluggage Mr McCormick Ms McGivern Dr Mulligan Mr Shannon Mr Stewart Mr Sweeney	APOLOGIES: Mr Gamble Mr Gray Dr Griffith Mr McConnell Dr Smyth Miss Wilson
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IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Higgins (secretary)

The meeting conveyed their best wishes to Mr McCormick on his move to Water Reform Unit, Department for Regional Development in early November and thanked him for his invaluable work in the Department, as head of Public Service Reform Unit. The meeting also welcomed Mr Shannon to the post of Deputy Director, Executive Information Service and to his first senior management group meeting.

1. Summary of last meeting

The summary of the Senior Management Group meeting held on 22 September was noted and amendments agreed.

2. **Assembly Issues**

Mrs Flanagan advised the meeting that she had arranged a meeting to discuss a range of issues related to restoration planning. Detailed follow up sessions could then be held with heads of Divisions, probably once a timescale for restoration became clearer.

3. **Fit for Purpose**

This item was moved to an earlier time in the meeting to facilitate a general discussion on that subject and the draft document, "Priorities and Budget 2005-08" which set out the Government's priorities and proposed spending plans for the three-year period 2005-06 to 2007-08. With regard to the Budget 2004 a further £1million per annum in 2005/06 and 2006/07 would have to be found in terms of efficiencies. It was agreed that a round of bi-lateral meetings would be arranged between the PEFO and certain Directors, to discuss efficiency savings.

Action: Directors and Finance Branch.

The "Fit for Purpose" draft document outlined the agenda for meeting the challenges for reform. It was agreed that the document should be tabled as an item for discussion at the next senior management meeting. **Action: Secretary to the Senior Management Meeting**

3. **The Potential for e-Participation in Government**

Mr McCluggage tabled a paper on e-participation which is a generic term for the consultation or the engagement of citizens in Government's policy process, policy making, law making and scrutiny by elected representatives and the processes of policy-formulation in political parties and other civil society organizations. A Whitehall paper defines e-participation as, "the use of ICT to open the channels for participation in the democratic process between elections". Given the relevance of the issue across the NICS a project and small Steering Group involving a number of other Departments was set up. A subsequent report made a number of

recommendations which stated:

- (i) Departments should be encouraged to standardize the consultation area on their websites.
- (ii) The e-Government Board should be invited to consider the case for an e-Consultation Zone as against working to improve the current Consultation Register.
- (iii) These proposals should inform the work of EIS on website development.
- (iv) No further action on an e-participation strategy pending the restoration of devolution.

A general discussion addressed issues concerning access for children, young people, the elderly and disabled, the relevance of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act to promote equality of opportunity and the importance of standardisation of consultation zones across all departments. Consultation zones are electronic points of interface between government departments and citizens for all matters relating to policy.

The meeting supported the report's recommendations and agreed that it provided a good example of reform and joined up government. It was agreed that the views of the meeting on access issues would be reported back to the e-Government Board. **Action: Mr McCluggage.**

4. Tour de Table

- a) Mr Mulligan reported that consultations were ongoing in respect of New TSN (a future anti poverty strategy), an Older People Draft Strategy (Promoting Social Inclusion) and Gender Equality Strategy.
- b) Mr Jackson advised that guidance on liaison between Departments in advance of the issue of consultation documents was being prepared for issue to all Departments in the near future and that Security Advisory Unit were drafting guidance for Departments on document and IT security. Mr Hamilton emphasised that the, "clear desk policy" was an essential element of effective security.
- c) Mrs Cummins reported on progress in respect of the Crumlin Road Gaol site, including the appointment of consultants to take forward a technical feasibility study and development of the community capacity building programme in north Belfast.
- d) Mr McCluggage reported that the General Consumer Council would be involved in market testing of Yellow Pages and that the Yellow Pages format would be used to improve the BT telephone books, through clearer government bodies contact information, including the possibility of developing single points of contact for public service organisations. Mr McCluggage also reported on ongoing work in respect of Digital Inclusion and the examination of technology health checks for IT security monitoring.
- e) Mr Finegan provided an update on the Review of Public Administration which was recently attracting some media interest.
- f) Mr McCormick gave an update on progress on Freedom of Information (FOI) including awareness training for senior civil servants and guidance on exemptions and the charging regime which would be forthcoming shortly. Mr Hamilton acknowledged

the ongoing work in the Department to prepare for, and continue to raise staff awareness of, FOI. He emphasised the need for that work to continue at divisional level.

- g) Mr Johnston reported that a Good Governance meeting was arranged for the 27 October in London and a British Irish Council Ministerial meeting on drug abuse chaired by Dermot Aherne, was scheduled for 8 November in Edinburgh which Minister Angela Smith would attend as the UK Ministerial representative. Mr Johnston also advised that a British Irish Council summit was planned for the 19 November in Guernsey and the main topic would be tourism.
- h) Mr McCartney updated the meeting on the Dismore Nationality Bill which had been voted down in the House of Commons and would therefore result in a long delay for that Bill.
- i) Mr Shannon reported that the Secretary of State had agreed to a project team, led by Executive Information Service, to be set up to review all aspects of Government advertising with the aim of developing a revised policy approach.
- j) Mr Stewart reported that the present position on the report of the Maze Consultation Panel would be tabled for discussion at the Good Governance meeting in London on 27 October.
- k) Mrs Bunting reported on the equality agenda and specifically that the Government expects to introduce a bill to establish a new Commission for Equality & Human Rights in Great Britain in the near future. One of the new Commission's priorities when it comes into operation will be to review the current discrimination legislative framework, with a view to bringing forward a single Equality Act.
- l) Mrs Flanagan advised that Bill Smith was retiring from the Northern Ireland Civil Service on 5 November 2004 following a long and distinguished career, mainly in the Department of

Health, Social Services and Public Safety but also in the Department.

- m) Mr Sweeney reported that Tim Losty, Head of the NI Bureau, Washington, had made a recent visit to Northern Ireland and presented an outline of the Bureau's purpose and strategy, to promote Northern Ireland in the USA, to the Permanent Secretary Group. Mr Losty also delivered a similar presentation to the October meeting of the Departmental Board.

5. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the senior management group is scheduled for Wednesday 17 November 2004, commencing at 9.30 a.m. in the Conference Room E4.18 Castle Buildings. Due to the rescheduling of the Departmental Board it was agreed to cancel the December meeting of the senior management group.

MARK HIGGINS

8 November 2004