

**NI Practitioners' Group on Freedom of Information
Minutes of a Meeting held in Castle Buildings on
Thursday 3 September 2009 at 9.30 am**

Attendees

Bernard McCaughan	CFOI, OFMDFM
Brenda Marson, Departmental Information Manager (DIM)	DEL
Brendan McNabb*	Singularity
Catriona Hutcheon*	Steria
Charlene McQuillan (DIM)	DHSSPS
Ciaran Murphy (DIM)	OFMDFM
Colin McWhirter (DIM)	DARD
Darren Moan*	DSD
Dave Brittain (DIM)	DOE
David Crabbe (DIM)	DRD
David Huddleston	PRONI
David Lammey (Chair)	Head of CFOI, OFMDFM
Des Magee*	Steria
Donal Shearer*	DRD
FOI Information Officer	NIO
Gail Younger*	DFP
Helen Lindsay*	DEL
Iain Fleming*	PRONI
Imelda McConnell (DIM)	DSD
Jan Davoll*	Steria
John Walker*	Singularity
Karen McCready	DFP
Louise Donaldson	DE
Records Management Team Representative	NIO
Norah McCorry*	OFMDFM
Paul McGrory	DOE
Paul O'Neill*	Singularity
Renee O'Cleary	DETI
Sandra Dorrian	DCAL
Tracy Beattie*	DARD

* Attended Item 4 only.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 9 June 2009, were agreed.

Action: CFOI team

2. Matters Arising (from previous minutes)

2.1 Further to matters arising from the previous meeting the following was reported:

- 2.1.1** Paragraph 2.1.1: Several Departments still had to complete the data protection e-learning training provided by DID, DFP. The Group was also advised that Central FOI (CFOI) team had approached the National School of Government for the use of the Cabinet Office's Data Protection e-learning package. As most Departments expressed an interest in this training product, access is being arranged for a nominated individual (from each of the Departments) to assess it and make recommendations as to its use. DCAL has already made use of the Cabinet Office e-learning package, and considered it worthwhile.
- 2.1.2** Paragraph 2.1.2: Head of CFOI team advised that there had been limited progress in considering revisions to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) FOI 'Co-ordination Arrangements' document, as priority over the summer months had been given to work on the Tracking System replacement project. He also commented that the development of that system may influence co-ordination procedures. **Action: Head of CFOI to complete review taking into account FOI workflow processes.**
- 2.1.3** Paragraph 2.1.3: In relation to the Publication Scheme Definition Document, it was noted that DFP (via CFOI team) had issued guidance regarding the proactive disclosure of financial information on 5 August 2009. DFP was awaiting further guidance from HM Treasury.
- 2.1.4** Paragraph 2.1.8: DRD representative advised that because of annual leave arrangements, the Employment sub-group had not met with Central Personnel Group, DFP, to discuss the possibility of proactively disclosing employment-related information in the future. **Action: DRD representative to follow up and report.**
- 2.1.5** Paragraph 2.1.10: Head of CFOI team confirmed that the FOI Annual Report 2008 was now available on the OFMDFM website, and that Departments would receive two hard copies shortly. **Action: CFOI issued copies to Departments early September 2009.**
- 2.1.6** Paragraph 4: Regarding the theft of laptops from Royston House, the DFP representative stated that the detailed review of the incident - undertaken in consultation with the Cabinet Office - had been completed and the results were now being considered. She also advised that a large number of subject access requests had been received by DFP as a consequence of the theft.
- 2.1.7** Paragraph 5: The Publication of Board (and sub-committee) Papers was discussed. Having taken into account the practices of other Departments, the DRD representative advised that his Department had decided not to publish any further sub-committee papers.
- 2.1.8** Paragraph 6: In relation to the Security Policy Framework and Overseas FOI legislation, Head of CFOI team advised that he had received no further feedback from Departments, and had issued guidance on 10 July 2009 to the Washington and Brussels Offices following consultation with the Cabinet Office.

2.1.9 Paragraph 9: Head of CFOI team reminded Departments that he had issued to them an Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) letter of 24 August 2009, about changes to crown copyright licensing. OPSI had asked for feedback. However, the correspondence had not elicited any comments.

3. Access to Information Training

3.1 A discussion took place on the current state of play regarding access to information training.

3.2 Head of CFOI team stated that course material for 'Working with FOI'; 'Practical Data Protection'; 'DPA Principles'; and 'Access to Information: Foundation Course' had been received from the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL) for quality assurance, as these courses were considered a priority by CAL. Practitioners agreed to assist CFOI team with the quality assurance exercise. **Action: CFOI sent course material to Practitioners for quality assurance in early September 2009.**

3.3 Practitioners noted recent comments from Central Procurement Division, DFP, regarding the training provider's delivery of the training contract.

3.4 Practitioners then commented on how they had or planned to raise the training issue with their Departmental Boards or senior management.

4. Replacement NICS FOI Request Tracking and Monitoring System Project

4.1 Head of CFOI team drew Practitioners' attention to the recently issued Project Board minutes, as they set the context for the two presentations to follow.

4.2 A Steria representative delivered a presentation that demonstrated the capabilities of TRIM workflow. Questions were taken and answered throughout the presentation.

4.3 Another Steria representative delivered a presentation that demonstrated the capabilities of TRIM, as regards the production of reports. Questions were taken and answered throughout the presentation.

4.4 The Singularity representatives delivered a presentation that demonstrated the software capabilities of the Singularity workflow product, highlighting various functions that TRIM workflow was unable to offer. These included the availability of an address book; the facility to re-allocate tasks due to staff leave arrangements; links to templates letters which can be edited; the automation of responses; and the facility to 'reset the clock' for 'clarification' purposes. Questions were taken and answered throughout the presentation.

4.5 After the Steria and Singularity staff left the meeting, a discussion followed. Practitioners were impressed with Singularity's capabilities and noted the limitations of TRIM workflow. It was agreed that Head of CFOI should write to Departmental

Information Managers seeking written agreement to move forward with the project using Singularity workflow software. **Action: Head of CFI wrote to DIMs on 9 September 2009.**

5. Whitehall Update

- 5.1** '30-year Rule' Review: The UK Government will now publish its response in 'late summer' with a change to 20 years having been publicly announced. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have responded to correspondence from Michael Wills agreeing to the reduction to 20 years.
- 5.2** Section 4 Coverage Orders: CFI had written to Practitioners recently seeking an updated return following the Northern Ireland Civil Service submission to the Ministry of Justice of 21 November 2009.
- 5.3** Section 5 Coverage: The Ministry of Justice, in its response to a public consultation concerning the designation of additional public authorities, announced that the FOI Act will be extended to cover four new categories: the Financial Ombudsman Service; academy schools; the Association of Chief Police Officers; and UCAS (the University Admissions Service).
- 5.4** Section 46 Code of Practice on Records Management: Practitioners had been advised by PRONI of the publication of the revised Code.

6. ICO Update

- 6.1** Head of CFI team advised that the ICO's NI Regional Office would be represented at the upcoming Privacy Impact Assessment workshop to be held on 23 September 2009.
- 6.2** Practitioners were made aware of the 'Caseload snapshot' available on the ICO website. The 'snapshot' lists FOI and EIR cases that have been under consideration by the ICO for 30 days or more and are currently 'open'. **Action: CFI sent link to the caseload snapshot on 5 September 2009.**
- 6.3** Head of CFI team highlighted some extracts from the ICO's Operations Management Committee minutes of 20 May 2009, which concern the allocation of cases.

7. Date of Next Meeting

- 7.1** The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 3 December 2009 in the Conference Room (E4.02) Castle Buildings at 10.00 am.

Meeting concluded at 1.10 pm.