

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 26 NOVEMBER 2008**

PRESENT: Bruce Robinson (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan, George Gray,
Stephen Grimason Deirdre Kenny, Jackie Kerr,
John McMillen and Eddie Rooney.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Higgins (Secretary).Tom Kennedy, Peter King
and Colm Shannon.

APOLOGIES: Richard Bullick and Dara O'Hagan.

Welcome

1. The Chairman welcomed Tom Kennedy and Colm Shannon to the meeting for the agenda item on the Northern Ireland Direct programme and Peter King who was attending for Richard Bullick.

Minutes of Last Meeting

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 29.10.08 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

3. It was agreed that an additional column would be added to the table to include target dates for the completion of each action. **Action: Mark Higgins.** Bruce Robinson emphasised the importance of members providing updates on progress in completing actions so it was also agreed that the table would be issued within 10 days in advance of Board meetings to members to provide updates to the secretary within 3 working days. **Action: Members.**

Northern Ireland Direct Programme

4. Tom Kennedy and Colm Shannon provided an update on the NI Direct Programme which will offer three new ways to access government services. Tom outlined two of the three key aspects of the programme, i.e. a single three digit contact number which will be formally launched in the New Year. Initially it will handle enquiries for: the General Register Office, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Rivers Agency and Animal Health), Planning Service and Land & Property Services; and an easy to remember flooding incident line, making it easy to report flooding.
5. Colm explained the third aspect of the programme, i.e. NI Direct, a localised, theme-based, public facing website where citizens can find information and services by browsing topics, such as: health and wellbeing; money, tax and benefits; motoring; or property and housing. They will also be able to find information via audience groups, such as: young people; people with disabilities or parents. It will launch in late March 2009.
6. The Board discussed the programme in the context of the Department's responsibilities. It was agreed that Colm would provide a paper to the December meeting which would set out OFMDFM's responsibilities. **Action: Colm Shannon.** The Board would also consider any emerging Departmental risk management issues associated with the programme.

Executive Business

7. Rosalie Flanagan provided an update on Assembly matters and related Executive business including a proposed schedule of Executive meetings over the next few weeks. Mary Bunting

reported on North South Ministerial Council meetings which were under consideration.

Complaints Handling Procedure

8. The Board discussed a paper which summarised previous papers considered by the Board members by correspondence. The papers proposed the introduction of a Departmental complaints handling procedure. Customers who wished to raise a complaint about the quality of service provided by the Department would be able to do so via the Department's website with options for complaining by other means if they preferred. The Board approved the introduction of the procedure on a pilot basis for 6 months to monitor the effectiveness of the system and make improvements as necessary. A report on the outcome of that pilot would be provided to the June 2009 Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

Financial Report

9. The Board noted a report from Jackie Kerr on the Department's resource and capital expenditure against budget for the period April 2008 to October 2008. The report was compiled on an exception basis, with explanations provided for significant variances, and supported by summary tables detailing that information by Directorate.
10. The report summarised December monitoring proposals for submission to DFP on 4.12.08 and which included reduced requirements of approximately £5.5 million for Resource and a similar amount for Capital. The report also outlined the Administration forecast to 31 March 2009. In overall terms the Department's Net Resource Expenditure at 42% is showing an

underspend of 2% against the budget profile. Resource reduced requirements of £5.479 million were put forward by Directorates in December Monitoring. These should have a positive impact on the final outturn position.

11. Overall capital spend for the period to October is showing a more significant divergence between actual and profiled expenditure at 7% against a profile of 2%. Directorates put forward capital easements of £5.528 million in the December Monitoring round. There is a forecast final year end administration overspend of £0.632 million (3.8%). The September Monitoring budget deficit has been reduced by the offset of net administration easements of £0.221million declared in December Monitoring, relating mainly to savings generated through the moratorium on vacancies.
12. The Board also noted that a December Monitoring bid to have £0.750 million Resource budget reclassified as Administration has been proposed to Ministers. If successful, this would effectively offset the forecast underspend as calculated at this point in the financial year.
13. Frank Cushnahan raised a question about a financial review of the Department's Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). It was agreed an update on that subject would be provided to the December Board meeting. **Action: John McMillen.**

Corporate Services Update

14. Deirdre Kenny tabled a paper which provided the latest available information on Departmental headcount and vacancies at 1.11.08; a summary of sickness absence during September 2008; an update on attendance at training courses, by Directorate, for April to October 2008; and

Freedom of Information (FOI) statistics on performance by Directorate in responding to FOI requests.

15. The Board discussed non-attendance figures for training courses and Deirdre Kenny explained that she seeks specific reasons for non-attendance from staff via their Heads of Division. Deirdre advised that staff are informed of the need to notify Training and Development Unit as soon as possible if are unable to attend so that a replacement can be sought.

Business Change Programme: Highlight Report

16. The Board noted the monthly report on the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme and discussed AccountNI, in particular, the need to increase the use of the Purchase Order Module. Refresher training for staff is to be organised. **[Action: Jackie Kerr]**. Deirdre Kenny reported on the implementation of the next Phase of HRConnect, i.e. payroll and absence management.

Corporate Development Project Steering Group: Report

17. The Board noted the report of the Corporate Development Project Steering Group and approved the recommendations which included:
 1. proposals relating to an education/awareness programme for Line Managers;
 2. the need to improve communications within the Department;
 3. the intention to “refresh” the Steering Group; and
 4. to commit to resourcing a Corporate Development Programme Officer to take forward the work programme.

18. It was agreed, for recommendation 1 above, to produce a "script" which will be delivered to all managers in the Department. The Centre for Applied Learning (CAL) has been approached to assist with the script. The message will focus on the importance of the role of the line managers in business planning issues and the responsibility that managers at all grades have on delivering on the objectives by having the right levels of staff in place, who are well trained, professional and motivated. The report proposed that the script is delivered to all staff using a similar model to that used to cascade the information on business planning, thus promoting staff involvement at all levels.

19. It was agreed that the Communications Group's interim report would be re-examined as part of the future work programme being taken forward by the proposed Corporate Development Programme Officer. The detail on identifying and defining that post would be considered outside the Board meeting. Progress on the future work programme would be reported to the Board in the new year. **Action: John McMillen.**

Departmental Brief

20. The Board noted the draft Brief and agreed that additional material would be provided to the Board secretary within the next two days to initiate the Team Briefing process within the Department. A decision on the need for a Brief for the December Board meeting was under consideration.

Board's Forward Plan

21. The Board agreed changes to the Forward Plan for December 2008 and January 2009.

Date of Next Meeting

22. The next meeting was scheduled for 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 18.12.08, in the Glass House, Stormont Castle.

Mark Higgins

3.12.08