

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 29 OCTOBER 2008**

- PRESENT:** Bruce Robinson (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Rosalie Flanagan, George Gray, Stephen Grimason
Jackie Kerr, Deirdre Kenny, John McMillen and
Eddie Rooney.
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Liz Elliott and Mark Higgins (Secretary).
- APOLOGIES:** Richard Bullick, Frank Cushnahan and Dara O'Hagan.

Welcome

1. The Chairman welcomed Liz Elliott to the meeting for the agenda item on managing attendance.

Minutes of Last Meeting

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 25.9.08 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

3. Updates to outstanding action points from previous meetings and recorded on the Action Points table were agreed. An updated table would be completed and issued with the draft minutes of the 29 October 2008 meeting.
4. It was agreed that future Board meetings would be restricted to two hours which members would take account of when proposing agenda items to the secretary for appropriate action. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

Executive Business

5. Rosalie Flanagan provided an update on Assembly matters and related Executive business.

Bain Report

6. The Board discussed the Bain report with the focus on the report's reference to the Victims and Survivors Commission as one of the possible candidates for relocation outside Belfast given its regional interest. Eddie Rooney advised that the Commission have taken on board the regional aspect of their service. The Board concurred that there are arguably sound business reasons for the Commission having a presence in Belfast.

Corporate Performance Report

7. The Board discussed the second Corporate Performance Report (CPR) for the quarter ending 30 September 2008. Discussion on financial issues included the paper tabled by Jackie Kerr on the management of forecast administration deficit for the financial year 2008-09. The Board agreed with the latter papers recommendations that Directors:-
 - a. note the forecast year end outturn on administration cost spend based on actual outturn to 30 September 2008;
 - b. note the action being taken to control the level of administration cost spend for the remainder of 2008/09;
 - c. agree that salary budgets are limited to staff in post, and that any allocated budget provision for vacant posts is recouped to offset the deficit; and
 - d. submit proposals for staff management action to be taken to address the remaining deficit forecast.

8. It was agreed that Directors should respond to the Finance Director by 31.10.08 with their proposals for the claw back of salary budgets totalling £356,000. It was also agreed that Directors would give in-depth consideration to produce further savings by reducing discretionary administration expenditure. **Action: Directors.** Deirdre Kenny would also examine opportunities for savings in IT expenditure, taking account of appropriate contractual arrangements. The Board would re-visit the issues concerned with the management of forecast administration deficit for the financial year 2008-09, at the November Board meeting.

9. The Board discussed the structure and format of the CPR and in particular the possibility of duplication of financial formation in the report and with other financial reports that are tabled for Board meetings. It was agreed that the Finance Director would revamp the financial sections of the CPR to address the concern about duplication. **Action: Jackie Kerr.** It was also agreed that Eddie Rooney would review Section 3.5 of the CPR to align it more with the Department's requirement to report on its implementation of the equality and good relations duties (under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order. **Action: Eddie Rooney.**

10. John McMillen advised that the 16.10.08 Audit Committee meeting agreed that he would lead a review of the current Corporate Risk Register and report the outcome of that review to the Board. **Action: John McMillen.**

Corporate Development Project Steering Group: Report

11. It was agreed to defer the above report to the November Board. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

Draft Complaints Procedure Paper

12. This item was deferred to the November Board meeting for consideration. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

Report To Those Charged With Governance

13. The Board noted a Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report on its audit of the Department's Resource Accounts for the 2007-08 financial year. The report provides NIAO's recommendations for action, the audit conclusion and management's response to those recommendations. The report resulted in the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) providing a clean audit opinion.

Management of Forecast Administration Cost Deficit

14. Discussion on the above paper, tabled by Jackie Kerr, was covered under the agenda item on the Corporate Performance Report (see paragraphs 7 and 8 above).

Use of Account NI Purchase Order Modules

15. The Board noted a paper tabled by Finula Magowan, Finance Division, which provided detailed information on the use of the non-Purchase Order route within OFMDFM for September 2008, as requested by the Board. Members concurred that the report was very useful and indicated that there was room for improvement by business areas to increase the use of the Purchase Order module for all relevant invoices.

16. It was agreed that Directors would continue to ensure that their staff are made aware of the need to raise Purchase Orders for invoices. Finance Division would monitor the use of Account NI Purchase Order modules and report progress to the Departmental Board.

Audit Committee: 16.10.08 Meeting Update

17. John McMillen provided an update on the key issues discussed at the latest Audit Committee meeting. The minutes of 16.1.0.08 meeting will be issued to Board members as soon as they are approved by the Committee. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

Managing Attendance

Monthly Absence Report

18. Liz Elliott provided an overview of the latest Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA) report for August 2008 which she had tabled for the Board to note. The format provided in the NISRA report has been amended to provide more detailed information at directorate level. The report shows that the Department's overall absence rate at August 2008 was 2.9% which compares favourably with other Departments. Liz explained that future reports would issue by correspondence to Board members for their information.

Stress and Other Long Term Absence

19. The Board noted a paper provided by Liz Elliott on management of stress and other long term absence within OFMDFM. The paper detailed the wide range of procedures in place in OFMDFM to address that type of absence including:
 - Carecall the independent counselling organisation employed by the NICS;

- the advice and liaison role provided by Personnel Branch;
- the professional and confidential advice and information service provided by the Staff Welfare Service;
- the Occupational Health Service (OHS);
- the variety of training courses available to line managers with the potential to reduce work-related stress; and
- Workplace Health events which are specific programmes targeted at raising staff awareness on health and welfare issues provided by outside agencies.

20. Liz's report advised that the Department complies fully with the NICS policies on managing attendance and inefficiency arising from poor attendance, including the 3 step process required for dealing with disputes. The paper outlined the role of staff and line managers in carrying out their responsibilities, particularly in relation to interventions and the return to work interviews. Bruce Robinson emphasised the need for early intervention at the appropriate time.

21. The paper highlighted the positive impact of HRConnect which will provide more detailed management information to help managers obtain a clear overview of absence and to identify trends within their business areas. Bruce Robinson recommended that Liz Elliott's paper on management of stress and other long term absence should be used by line managers as a very useful and valuable update and reference guide. It was agreed that a further update on the management of stress and other long term absence would be provided for the February 2009 Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

Departmental Brief

22. Bruce Robinson advised that he wished to provide an introduction to the November Departmental Brief. Further material from other business areas would also be provided to the Board secretary to initiate the Team Briefing process within the Department.
23. Mr Robinson left the meeting at 3.30 p.m. on other urgent business and John McMillen chaired the remainder of the meeting.

Business Change Programme: Highlight Report

24. The Board noted the monthly report on the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme. Deirdre Kenny advised that as there are some issues to be resolved, responsibility for payroll cannot be transferred to HRConnect. October pay will therefore be processed using the existing system. Deirdre also emphasised the importance of Directors ensuring that all staff and line managers log on to HRConnect and complete the necessary steps, including entering leave information to ensure a smooth transition to HRConnect non-industrial payroll and absence management services.

Board's Forward Plan

25. The Board noted the Forward Plan which had been updated from changes received from members for meetings up to March 2009.

Date of Next Meeting

26. The next meeting was arranged for Wednesday 26.11.08 at 13.30 p.m. in the Glass House, Stormont Castle. Members noted that the Board's strategic planning day was scheduled for Tuesday 18.11.08, at 9.30 a.m. in Clifton House, Belfast. A programme and papers for that event would issue to members by the second week of November.

Mark Higgins

7.11.08