

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING  
ON 4 OCTOBER 2007**

**PRESENT:** Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,  
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan, George Gray,  
Stephen Grimason, Jackie Kerr, John McMillen  
Paul Priestly and Cynthia Smith.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Liz Elliott, Mark Higgins (Secretary) and  
Wendy Hunter-Hill.

**APOLOGIES:** Deirdre Kenny

**INTRODUCTIONS**

1. Nigel Hamilton welcomed Wendy Hunter-Hill to the meeting and explained that Wendy had recently joined the Department as the new Head of Central Management Branch and was attending as part of her induction training.

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2007 were agreed as amended.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Action Points**

3. Members provided updates to the current Action Points table for outstanding action points arising from previous meetings. An updated Action Points table would be issued with the minutes of the 4 October meeting. **Action: Board Secretary.**

## **Executive Business**

4. The Board noted the proposed programme of the Committee of OFMDFM up to 12 December 2007 and relevant members related their experience in appearing before the Committee on a wide range of issues including the Programme for Government, Budget monitoring rounds, OFMDFM Annual Report and Accounts, Commissioner for Public Appointments, EU Treaty Reform and equality issues such as Disability Discrimination. Members who appeared before the Committee concurred that it had shown a close interest and focus on the detail of the various issues brought before it. It was noted that the Committee have a supportive and advisory role as well as scrutinising the items of business which it examines.
  
5. The Board also discussed current key issues including the timetable for the Programme for Government, the Priorities and Budget exercise and legislative timetable. George Gray had advised that, in general there needed to be a stronger focus on progressing legislation. This would continue to be highlighted with special advisers at forthcoming meetings. Rosalie Flanagan reported that regular planning meetings with officials and special advisers to discuss key Departmental issues and forthcoming agenda items and papers for Executive meetings had proved useful.
  
6. Stephen Grimason raised a query about catering facilities in Stormont Castle and it was agreed that would be taken forward by Liz Elliott with Office Services who would report to Nigel Hamilton. **Action: Liz Elliott.**

### **Devolution of Justice**

7. John McMillen provided a synopsis of the progress report he tabled on determining the implications for the Department of devolving policing and justice powers. His latest report asked the Board to note further progress of the work of the project as well as on wider preparations across the NICS. It was agreed that John McMillen would provide further information to the Board on current Northern Ireland Office functions which might transfer to the devolved side in the event of devolution of policing and justice powers. **Action: John McMillen.**

### **Investors in People (IiP)**

8. Liz Elliott explained that the initial IiP Health Check Report compiled by IiP advisor, Eric Jenkinson provided a summary of his assessment of the Department's readiness to apply for corporate IiP accreditation. A more detailed report would be provided by Eric Jenkinson. The Board noted that the report recommended that further work need to be undertaken to achieve a successful assessment against the revised, current IiP Standard, to defer an application to early 2009 and to establish a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) to lead an IiP project team to take that work forward.
9. The Board recognised the importance of the complete commitment of the senior management to implementing the IiP concept effectively as a core business improvement initiative within the Department. The Board agreed that John McMillen would act as SRO to an IiP steering group. Liz Elliott would obtain further detail from Eric Jenkinson on the analysis of a

matrix which identifies, at Divisional level, those areas that require further work before identifying the membership of the steering group. It was also agreed that the use of a series of work streams would be the best method of addressing areas of potential improvement. Progress would be reported to the next Departmental Board. **Action: John McMillen.**

### **Freedom of Information (FOI)**

10. The Board endorsed the recommendations of a report tabled by the Departmental Information Manager, Ciaran Murphy to revise Departmental procedures for handling FOI requests. The Board also noted that the report incorporated recommendations from the Scott Report and provided very good practical procedures for improving the handling of FOI requests. It was agreed that the revised procedures should be implemented in full and formally issued to all staff with a supporting minute from Nigel Hamilton. The procedures would be formally reviewed for appropriateness / effectiveness by the Departmental Information Manager and the Director of Corporate Services in March of each year. They will then be issued to the Departmental Board for ratification and circulation to all staff. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

### **Strategic Planning Session**

11. The Board discussed the outstanding action points arising from the Strategic Planning session held on the 30 August 2007. Paul Priestly advised that the Board should start to consider corporate and business planning for 2008-09 and in that context Ministerial strategic priorities. Mr Cushnahan emphasised the need to engage at an early stage with Ministers as a key element of the

planning process. A general discussion considered various options for engagement with Ministers at Board, senior management level and with staff, for example at the next staff conference. It was agreed that John McMillen and Paul Priestly would take this work forward, consider options for that engagement and report back to the next Board meeting. **Action: John McMillen and Paul Priestly.**

### **Forward Plan**

12. The Board agreed to undertake a fundamental review, by the end of 2007, of all Forward Plan items with the focus on priorities and resources. **Action: Departmental Board.**

### **Resource Planning**

13. The Board noted a joint paper from Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr which summarised the current position for the Department's Fit for Purpose target, set by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), and the 2007-08 administration budget and resource reserve. The Board noted that the Department was on course to achieve target by 31 March 2008 including the current 30 vacancies waiting to be filled.
14. Jackie Kerr advised that the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007 efficiency measures and the impact of reform programme costs would result in baseline reductions. Mr Cushnahan raised a number of questions regarding the revised indicative allocations for OFMDFM in the context of reform costs and it was agreed as Chair of the Audit Committee he would

meet with the Accounting Officer, John McMillen and Director of Finance , Jackie Kerr to discuss that issue further. The Board noted additional pressures on the Department's baseline figures arising from restoration costs. Jackie Kerr advised that she was seeking further clarification from DFP on the restoration and reform programme costs..

15. Stephen Grimason left the meeting on urgent business.
16. The Board also noted an administration deficit for 2007-08 is estimated at about £1.69 million, and taking account of pressures arising from Restoration and other areas there would be a shortfall in the administrative budget of about £2.18 million. The adjusted resource position for the year is £982,552.

### **Financial Reports**

17. Jackie Kerr's paper on financial outturn as at 31 August 2007 showed, against profiled budget, an administration cost underspend of £0.262 (3.8%), a resource overspend of £0.756 million (-5.2%) and a capital underspend of £0.245 million (136.3%). Mrs Kerr reported that a full review of the Department's budgets in the context of October Monitoring had identified reduced requirements, several internal reallocations and a range of technical transfers.
18. The Board noted that OFMDFM's prompt payment performance for the month of June was 89% against a target of 95%. Mrs Kerr reported that business areas needed to improve in their

processing times for submitting invoices to Finance Division to improve prompt payment performance.

19. John McMillen advised that a suspected fraud case had been noted by the 20.9.07 Audit Committee and that all appropriate action had been taken in accordance with the Department's fraud policy and fraud response plan.

#### **Audit Committee Meeting**

20. The Board were informed of the key issues arising from the 20.9.07 Audit Committee meeting and that final minutes of that meeting would be circulated to Board members following the next Audit Committee meeting on 19.12.07.

#### **Managing Attendance**

21. The Board noted a brief paper from Deirdre Kenny which provided an update on sick absence rates for July and August 2007. Liz Elliott advised that the Department provides access to an external counselling service provider "CareCall" and as stress was one of the main causes of absence, Personnel is currently arranging a pilot awareness session with Action Mental Health, targeted at line managers, which will provide practical advice and guidance on recognising and dealing with stress.

#### **Performance Management**

22. The Board discussed a paper from Deirdre Kenny on performance appraisal markings in OFMDFM in the 2005-06 reporting year. It was agreed that line managers needed to

continue to ensure consistency in the application of performance appraisal.

### **Business Change Programme**

23. The Board noted an updated report which summarised the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme. Jackie Kerr advised that budget holders should notify Finance Division of any critical payments they may have at the earliest opportunity and well in advance of the transition period before the go live date of 5.11.07 for the introduction of AccountNI.
  
24. John McMillen reported on a workshop he attended recently, organised by the DFP on Civil Service Reform which focused on implementing and realising the benefits of the reform programme. Mr McMillen advised that he found the workshop very useful and worthwhile and it was agreed that he would recommend the workshop to the Department's Change Management Board to consider for relevant staff in OFMDFM.  
**Action: John McMillen.**

### **Any Other Business**

25. John McMillen requested input from the Director of Equality and Director of Strategy for Ministerial briefing on a paper on the review of water charges. Mr McMillen also reported that Norman Houston would replace the current Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, Tim Losty who was moving to a new post in late October 2007.

### **Review of Board Meeting**

26. The general consensus of opinion from members was that although the agenda for the meeting was substantial, discussion had focused on strategic issues and key priorities and the new agenda format and change of venue had assisted that decision making process.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

27. The next meeting of the Board was re-scheduled from 26.10.07 to Thursday 1 November, with a working lunch, from 12.00 mid-day to 14.00 p.m. in the Glass House, Stormont Castle.

**Mark Higgins**

10 October 2007