

reserve. As Mr McMillen was unavailable for this meeting it was agreed that variances against profiled budget for his business areas would be e-marked for Mr McMillen's attention and an update provided to the January 2007 Board meeting.

9. The Board commended the work being done by business areas in achieving the Department's prompt payment performance for October 2006 of 98% against a target of 95% for payments made within 30 days of invoices being received.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Memorandum of Understanding

10. The Board noted that the NIAO had completed an audit of the Department's 2005 – 06 Resource Accounts and had recently submitted a draft Memorandum of Matters Arising to Finance Division which sought a draft response from the Department to the points raised in the NIAO memorandum. Finance Division tabled a draft corporate response to the meeting, based on inputs from respective business areas, for the Board's consideration and approval.
11. The Board discussed the draft response in detail and agreed that amendments were required in the draft response to reflect the systems and the positive action already in place to address potential weaknesses. Mr Hamilton emphasised the importance the Board places on the NIAO Memorandum and the need to continually review systems and procedures. It was agreed that the Accounting Officer and the Chair of the Audit Committee

would draw up a checklist of action required to address any weaknesses identified in the NIAO Memorandum of Matters Arising (**Action: John McMillen**) including:

- the requirement for sponsoring divisions to ensure they have access to the internal and external audit reports of the Department's sponsored bodies; **Action: Directors**; and
- budget holders to continue to ensure that control procedures for payment authorisations are effective; **Action: Budget Holders**.

Faster Closing

12. Finance Division tabled a draft Project Initiation Document (PID) which contained high level faster closing plans and timetables for the period December 2006 to December 2008 and a detailed accounts preparation timetable for the 2006/07 financial statements. The timetables include key checkpoints for the Board and Audit Committee to review the draft accounts before submission to the NIAO.
13. The Board approved the faster closing PID project plans and timetables noted the role of the Board and Audit Committee in the project management of the faster closing project and the responsibilities of the Board and Audit Committee in the consideration and approval of the year end financial statement.
14. The Board also agreed to the 11 June 2007 deadline for the submission of OFMDFM's accounts to NIAO for audit, subject to the availability of key year end financial data from DFP. It was also agreed that the 2006/07 faster closing deadline is confirmed

with NIAO and DFP and that both bodies are provided with copies of OFMDFM's faster closing plans and timetables. Training and development of relevant staff in sponsored bodies was also discussed and it was agreed that Finance Division would take that forward through the sponsor division. **Action: Finance Division.**

15. The Board noted the concerns regarding the timeframe for the faster closing project which overlaps with the timetable for the implementation of Account NI increasing the risks to the successful delivery of both projects in the context of the Division's resource constraints. It was agreed that the Accounting Officer would raise that resource matter with the Department of Finance and Personnel. **Action: John McMillen.**

Account NI

16. Finance Division tabled a paper on a high level communications strategy and timetable for the implementation of Account NI in OFMDFM for the Board's approval. The Board approved the communications strategy and noted the involvement of the Executive Information Service in facilitating that process.
17. The Board also noted that OFMDFM and DFP are scheduled to be the first departments to transfer to Account NI on 4 June 2006, and as such will play a key role in the implementation of the project. In OFMDFM implementation will be led by Finance Division but specialist knowledge of each business area is also required. It was agreed therefore that Directors should identify key groups and individuals who will be involved in the

to confirm their attendance and choose their preference for a breakout session at the event. The Board recommended that Directors encourage their staff to attend. Deirdre Kenny also reported that a significant number of annual appraisal reports for staff were outstanding and relevant Directors should ensure that they are completed and returned to Personnel as a matter of urgency.

27. Stephen Grimason reported that Executive Information Service (EIS) had received a bronze award from the Northern Ireland Quality Awards, Steps to Excellence process recently. EIS are the first public sector communications organisation in the UK to receive that award.
28. Cynthia Smith reported that the Programme for Government Committee would be debating next week the Government's "Lifetime Opportunities", Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland. The strategy was also debated by the Northern Ireland Grand Committee at their meeting in Belfast on 12 December 2006. Mrs Smith also reported that the Gender Equality Strategy would be launched on 19 December 2006 and she provided an update on the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) that had been laid before Parliament and would be debated in the House of Lords on 9 January 2007.
29. Mary Bunting provided an update on North South matters in respect of the Implementation Bodies.

