

**MINUTES OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING
ON 16 MARCH 2006
IN ROOM E4.02 CASTLE BUILDINGS**

Present:	Paul Sweeney (Chair) Billy Gamble Stephen Grimason Neill Jackson Jackie Kerr Laurene McAlpine Gerry Mulligan Linda Wilson	Apologies:	Mary Bunting Rosalie Flanagan George Gray Nigel Hamilton Stewart Johnston Alan Maitland Denis McCartney Greg McConnell Colm Shannon
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In Attendance: Mark Higgins (secretary)

Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the Senior Management Group (SMG) meeting held on 19 January 2006 were noted and amendments agreed.

Matters Arising

2. Nigel Hamilton issued a minute to members to highlight the importance of the role and purpose of SMG and to plan future agenda items. This matter was covered under item 4 of the meeting.

OFMDFM Parliamentary Questions Performance

3. Neill Jackson provided the meeting with information on the total number of PQs asked of each Department and the number answered on time in the period 3 October 2005 to 17 February 2006. The information indicated that OFMDFM answered the fewest number of questions on time and fell well short of the

Cabinet Office performance target of 95% of PQs being answered on time.

4. The meeting discussed the Department's performance and possible reasons for lateness. The meeting noted that the Department's central role often resulted in it receiving a significant number of PQs that require cross-departmental co-ordination which contributed to delays in response times.
5. It was agreed that Assembly Section would issue up to date performance information to Directors for discussion at the March meeting of the Departmental Board. In the meantime Assembly Section would examine recent PQs to identify the main reasons for lateness and lessons to learn for improving performance. The meeting noted the responsibility for Heads of Divisions to ensure that their business area has an effective monitoring system to track progress on PQs. **Action: Assembly Section/ Heads of Division.**

Update on Financial Issues

6. Jackie Kerr updated the meeting on a range of financial matters including the current focus on 2005/06 year end profiling of budgets. Work was also ongoing with budget holders to agree and set budgets for 2006/07 and in that context Jackie advised that salary budgets will be based on actual staff-in-post figures.
7. On progress with the "Faster Closing" initiative Mrs Kerr advised that all departmental resource accounts are required to be laid before Parliament before the Summer Recess in 2008. To achieve

this, departments must progressively reduce the time elapsed in the preparation of the year end financial statements by a period of 10 weeks by 2008. Mrs Kerr advised that the Department was expected to meet the earliest deadline for completion in relation to the 2005/06 financial statements, i.e. 26 June 2006.

8. Mrs Kerr also provided further updates on the Accounting Service Programme (ASP) including plans to set up a departmental project team with representatives from key spending directorates.
9. The Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007/08 was also discussed and although no specific timetable had been provided by HM Treasury at this stage, it was agreed that directors should be giving consideration now to key issues.

Future Agenda Items

10. As a result of discussions at the previous 19.1.06 meeting, and Nigel Hamilton's minute of 7.3.06 to SMG on its role, the meeting considered a number of key speakers from external bodies who could be invited to future meetings to add value to discussions. Several individuals were proposed as possible speakers to address SMG on relevant topics.
11. It was agreed that Paul Sweeney would raise the matter at the next Departmental Board to obtain their view on the proposed speakers and if accepted that arrangement would be reviewed after two sessions had taken place. **Action: Paul Sweeney.**

Tour de Table

- 12.** Jackie Kerr commented on the need for a joined-up approach to the reform agenda, specifically the Reform of Public Administration (RPA) and current major programmes and initiatives such as Electronic Human Resources (e-HR), the Accounting Services Programme (ASP) and related issues such as workforce planning.

- 13.** Paul Sweeney reminded members of a request from the Head of the Civil Service that as many members as possible should attend the next masterclass, which was part of a series of masterclasses for senior civil servants, on 28.3.06 at which the Secretary of State would be the key note speaker on the topic of reform.

- 14.** Linda Wilson provided an update on the work of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) including SIB recruitment and developments in relation to the two tier workforce. She also drew the Group's attention to the Secretary of State's recent decision to exclude cleaning services from schools' PPP contracts.

- 15.** Stephen Grimason advised that the Secretary of State would be making an announcement on 21.3.06 on the Review of Public Administration (RPA) concerning significant recommendations on the future of Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

- 16.** Gerry Mulligan reported on developments following the second period of consultation on the review of the New Targeting Social Need (TSN) policy and plans for a new anti-poverty strategy.

17. Billy Gamble reported that a Written Ministerial Statement would be made by the Secretary of State on Monday 21.3.06 on significant child protection measures. These included steps to strengthen the sex offences law, new vetting and barring arrangements and a single Regional Safeguarding Board. These would be contexted in progress towards the new 10-year strategy for children and young people.

Date of next meeting

18. The next meeting of the senior management group is scheduled for Thursday 15 June 2006, commencing at 10.45 a.m. in the 4th floor Conference Room E4.02, Castle Buildings.

MARK HIGGINS

22.3.06