

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING  
ON 19 DECEMBER 2007**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Kieran Cranney and Stephen Magee (DFP, Delivery  
and Innovation Unit); Drew Haire, Mark Higgins  
(Secretary), Ken Fraser and Neill Jackson.

**APOLOGIES:** Rosalie Flanagan.

**Minutes of Last Meeting**

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2007 were agreed as amended.

**Matters Arising**

2. Outstanding action points arising from previous meetings were discussed and amendments agreed. An updated action points table would be completed and issued with the draft minutes of the 19 December 2007 meeting. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

**Commissioner for Older People**

3. Cynthia Smith updated the meeting on the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's announcement to proceed with establishing the Office of Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland. Mrs Smith reported that the announcement

comes on foot of Ministers receiving an interim report from Deloitte Touche which concluded that there is widespread support for establishing the Office. Ministers have recognised however the need to consult with the age sector, older people and the Departmental Committee on the role and responsibilities for such an Office. It is hoped to do this in early 2008.

4. Cynthia Smith also advised that if, following completion of the review, Ministers conclude that there is a case for appointing a Commissioner for Older People it is anticipated that the necessary legislative change would take some two years to complete.

#### **A Shared Future & Racial Equality Strategy**

5. Drew Haire and Ken Fraser provided the meeting with an outline of the Assembly and Executive's commitment to "bring forward detailed plans, consistent with the pledge of office, to promote the interests of the whole community towards the goal of a shared future and a prosperous, peaceful and settled society" and urging the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister "to bring forward proposals for its own detailed plans for the period 2008-2011 to achieve racial equality and an inclusive society for our increasingly diverse community". Mr Haire explained that the Community Relations and Racial Equality Units within the Equality Directorate are working jointly on a document to "refresh" these direct rule policies to take account of the new political dispensation and to give local ownership.

6. It is intended to produce a document that will show the above related obligations will be met and fulfill commitments made in the draft Programme for Government (PfG) and draft Budget. In particular Public Service Agreement (PSA) 7, objective 5 – a “programme to improve societal relations”; PSA 7 objective 5 - to “Implement the Racial Equality Action Plan” and PSA 7 objective 2 - to “take forward co-ordinated strategic action to promote social inclusion for ...New Minority Ethnic Communities...”.
7. The document will set out proposals for the programme of funding included in the draft Programme for Government and Budget 2007. The focus will be on practical actions on the ground to improve the quality of life and life opportunities for all who live here, particularly adapted to tackle flashpoints where frictions manifest themselves. The emphasis will be on the role of local councils in delivering good relations. It will rehearse the business case for good relations and the economic imperative to tackle sectarianism and racism. The emphasis will also be on the need, if we are to build a better future for all, to compete globally to achieve Northern Ireland’s full economic potential and so become an even more attractive location for the flow of internationally mobile skills and labour, high value-added industries and secure high scale job investment.
8. The Board noted the positive developments in this strategy and Nigel Hamilton expressed, on behalf of the Board, their appreciation to Billy Gamble for his invaluable work and substantial impact in taking the strategy forward as head of the Good Relations and Reconciliation Division in the Department.

## **Review of Capacity and Structures in OFMDFM**

9. Stephen Magee and Eugene Cranney, members of the above Review team from DFP's Delivery and Innovation Division, provided an update to the Board on the progress and key findings to date. The Board noted that the assignment was a critical review of the structural organisation of directorates, divisions and branches across the Department, with the aim of identifying the most effective structure for delivery of departmental functions and for maximising the Department's flexibility to respond to new pressures and priorities; and to develop and reinforce its emerging corporate identity.
  
10. An assessment was also being made of any spare capacity that may exist, and advice on how this can be utilised/released through the reorganisation of functions/roles, or the reallocation of resources. The assessment included the Department's relationships with its Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and sponsored bodies, and advise on how best the Department should reconfigure the work to support these bodies to improve efficiency, effectiveness and greater consistency.
  
11. Account was also being taken of priorities as determined by Ministers and as managed by the Departmental Board, to advise on roles and functions that might be stopped, ramped down or transferred to other Departments to release resources to address priority work areas. The Review will also advise on the implications for the Department of continuing with the current organisational structure. The Efficiencies Sub-Group was acting

as the steering group for the Review and the Review team would assist in developing options for the OFMDFM Efficiency Plan.

12. Stephen Magee advised that the Review team had consulted with most OFMDFM Directors and as appropriate with Heads of Divisions and other staff and were now seeking a lead from the Board on the way forward in light of emerging findings. The Board provided the team with a number of working assumptions that would inform the next steps in the Review. It was agreed that the Board would be provided with a detailed analysis of findings and recommendations before the end of February 2008.  
**Action: John McMillen.**

#### **Devolution of Justice**

13. The Board received a progress report, tabled by John McMillen, on the project to plan for the impact on the Department of devolution of justice powers. It was noted that the project will culminate with the production of an implementation plan setting out the various implications for the Department, quantifying consequential financial and manpower transfers and recommending any organisational changes needed to deliver the new responsibilities. A final version of the plan should be agreed with the Project Board by the end of January 2008 which is the target date for completion. This would then be submitted to the Departmental Board for approval. **Action: John McMillen.**

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

14. Deirdre Kenny reported that the number of FOI cases had increased in number and complexity. The Board discussed

emerging key issues including the importance of continuing to meet deadlines for responding to FOI requests and a number of cases about hospitality. It was agreed that hospitality would be scheduled for discussion at the February 2008 Departmental Board. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

### **Executive Business**

15. Neill Jackson provided an update on the work of the Executive and related Assembly and OFMDFM Committee matters including performance in answering Assembly Questions, new accountability procedures and the Efficiency Review Panel. Members discussed the key current issues being considered by the Executive including the outcome of December financial monitoring, the draft Budget 2007 and the challenges that raises for Departments in prioritising spending.

### **Launching the OFMDFM Business Plan Process: 2008-09**

16. John McMillen provided an update on a number of successful events already held to inform and involve senior managers in the above process. He outlined the timetable for the production of directorate's business plans and risk management by 18 January 2008 using the agreed Balanced Scorecard approach approved by the Board.
17. The latter methodology would include the production of a Departmental strategy map by the business planning sub-group containing four quadrants of Customers, People/Organisation, Business Processes and Finance/Results. Each quadrant would include OFMDFMs strategic objectives as specified in the

Programme for Government. The map would be circulated to directorates for them to develop scorecards for each quadrant by producing, for each objective, targets, actions, measures and risks.

18. Mr McMillen explained that planned future events over the next few months, also approved by the Board, included engagement with Ministers and a Board strategic planning session both scheduled for mid-January and a second business planning session in February for the Department's senior management group who would play a key role in the process. A Departmental conference was also being organised by a sub-group for late February/ early March 2008 to inform staff about business planning and the various reform projects.

### **Efficiency Proposals/ Resource Planning/Financial Reports**

19. Given the substantial number and complexity of agenda items tabled for the December Board meeting and subsequent limited time available it was agreed to defer discussion on all of the above financial matters to a reconvened Departmental Board meeting at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday 10 January 2008 in Room 233, Dundonald House. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

### **Business Continuity Plan**

20. Deirdre Kenny tabled a paper on business continuity planning and explained that it is integral to good business practice and

provides the means to enable organisations to respond effectively to disruptions caused by factors outside their control.

21. The Board agreed that an annual review of the Departmental Business Continuity Plan should be initiated through the Emergency Management Steering Group in the interests of ensuring that corporate and business area Business Continuity Plans remain fit for purpose. Progress on the review would be reported to the April 2008 Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny.**

#### **Forward Plan**

22. The Board secretary tabled a revised forward plan for 2008-09, and members provided additional items for inclusion in the plan. An updated version would issue with the request to Board members for agenda items for the 30.1.08 Departmental Board meeting. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

#### **Managing Attendance**

23. Deirdre Kenny provided an update on managing attendance in the Department for October 2007 which showed an absence rate of 2.9% against a NICS absence rate of 5.4%. Figures for November 2007 were not yet available from the NI Statistics and Research Agency.

#### **Business Change Programme**

24. The Board noted an updated report which summarised the various priority 1 reform projects within the Business Change

Programme. Deirdre Kenny referred to the recent launch of HR Connect and AccountNI projects on 21 November and 3 December respectively. Both systems were now accessible to all staff via portals on their desktop workspaces. Staff were encouraged to make use of super users and report any technical problems they may experience to the relevant helpdesk.

### **Departmental Brief**

25. Due to the proximity of the Christmas holidays it was agreed to defer issuing a Departmental Brief until after the January 2008 Board meeting. **Action: Mark Higgins.**

### **Any Other Business**

#### **Gender Goods and Services Directives**

26. Cynthia Smith briefed the Board on the latest position in respect of the above directive. Cynthia advised that it was highly unlikely that the transposition or implementation date of 21 December 2007 for that legislation would be met which could lead to EU infraction proceedings or legal challenges from individuals.

### **Thanks**

27. Nigel Hamilton expressed his sincere appreciation to all Board members and asked that Directors convey his gratitude to all staff for their professional commitment throughout a demanding and challenging year for the Department.

**Date of Next Meeting**

28. The Board agreed to reconvene at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday 10 January in Room 233, Dundonald House to focus exclusively on financial matters as outlined in paragraph 19 above. The next regular monthly meeting of the Board will take place at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday 30 January 2008, also in Room 233 Dundonald House.

**Mark Higgins**

3 January 2008