

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 25 APRIL 2006**

PRESENT: Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, Billy Gamble,
Stephen Grimason, Deirdre Kenny, Jackie Kerr,
Denis McCartney and Greg McConnell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Higgins (Secretary) and
Stewart Johnston.

APOLOGIES: George Gray and Rosalie Flanagan.

Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2006 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

2. Matters arising were dealt with under the appropriate agenda item.

HR/ Financial Analysis

3. Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr tabled a combined paper on HR/Financial Analysis, incorporating workforce planning assumptions for 2006/07 and subsequent years. The paper emphasised the impact on the 2006/07 administrative budget of the return of a Transitional Assembly and additional pressures arising from delays in the delivery of workforce planning reductions, the provision of funding for the Review of Public Administration (RPA) Team and substantial new responsibilities and areas of work allocated to the Department for which no additional administration cost cover had been provided. The

Board noted progress by Directors in addressing all possible efficiencies in their business areas.

4. It was agreed that Nigel Hamilton would write to John Hunter, Department of Finance and Personnel to seek additional funding for the RPA Team and Transitional Assembly and outline the additional pressures arising from the Department's unique and new responsibilities. The letter would also highlight the wide range of services provided by OFMDFM to and on behalf of other NICS departments. **Action: Nigel Hamilton.**

5. It was also agreed that the May Board meeting would focus mainly on finance and workforce planning matters. Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr would table a paper at that meeting with a menu of what workforce planning reductions could be achieved, based on further returns from Directors which would provide proposals for reductions with the focus on functions as opposed to individual posts. **Action: Directors and Deirdre Kenny/Jackie Kerr.**

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly Issues

6. Stewart Johnston reported on potential political developments in the context of the Secretary of State's recent announcement on the introduction of an Emergency Bill to prepare for full devolution. Mr Johnston explained the proposed timetable for a Transitional Assembly and that the Secretary of State had met or would be meeting with the main political parties.

Departmental Board Forward Plan

7. In view of previous discussions on workforce planning and finance matters it was agreed that Deirdre Kenny and Mark Higgins would review the scheduling of items and issue an amended Forward Plan to Directors for comment in advance of the next Board meeting. **Action: Deirdre Kenny/ Mark Higgins.**

Finance and Accountability

8. Jackie Kerr tabled a report on provisional outturn information which detailed administration and resource expenditure by Directorate, to 31 March 2006. The paper included the main variances underlying the provisional resource outturn position, an analysis of the large underspend areas and detail on the current forecast of accrued expenditure, for these areas. The paper also provided a forecast of the year end administration cost outturn position by Division and a summary of the opening 2006-07 budget allocation for each Directorate.
9. Mrs Kerr advised that opening budgets for 2006/07 have been agreed with Budget Holders and were summarised in the finance paper. Future reports to the Board will track monthly outturn information against these profiled budgets. The Board noted a range of system improvements introduced by Finance Division including more robust monitoring arrangements, the tightening up of year-end procedures and the production of reliable data for budget holders and the Departmental Board.

Faster Closing

10. Mrs Kerr reported that the plan and timetable for January 2006 to December 2008 on faster closing of financial statements was on track. Mrs Kerr also tabled a timetable for the production of Resource Accounts for 2005/06 which identified the main tasks and deadlines for completion. Mr Cushnahan emphasised the need to ensure that all tasks are kept on track to avoid the possibility of major issues occurring because of the cumulative effect of a significant number of smaller tasks not being achieved. Mrs Kerr concurred and advised that at present all key tasks were on track.

11. The Board noted that the finance report outlined OFMDFM's further improvement in its performance on prompt payments with 99% performance achieved for March 2006.

NIAO Memorandum of Matters Arising

12. Jackie Kerr tabled an updated schedule of actions taken to date and proposed actions to address the NIAO recommendations arising from the audit of the department's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2005. The Board noted that this was also on track and recognised the efforts of everyone involved in the progress achieved to date.

Interim Accounts 2005/06

13. Jackie Kerr presented information on the structure and format of the departmental resource accounts, using the Interim Accounts to 30.9.05, as a model. The focus of the presentation was on the

lessons learned from the preparation of the Interim Accounts to be applied to the year-end accounts preparation process. The presentation also included feedback from the NI Audit Office on the Interim Accounts and lessons learned to be applied at year end.

14. The Board noted its new role for the effective management of the timetable and the process and in the finalisation of the 2005/06 annual report and the 2005/06 resource accounts. The final draft of the 2005/06 annual report would be signed off at the May meeting and it was agreed that Board Members would provide input as outlined in the draft annual report for 2005/06 provided to the meeting. **Action: Board Members.**

Freedom of Information

15. Deirdre Kenny provided an update on FOI cases for the period 1 January 2005 to 14 April 2006, which showed that the Department was continuing to perform well in responding to requests within Cabinet Office guidelines. The average time to process requests continued to be 10 days.

Managing Attendance

16. Deirdre Kenny provided a verbal update on the latest figures which showed a decrease in the Department's absenteeism rate during February 2006 to 4.2%, falling from 4.7% in January 2006. Personnel will continue to closely monitor absenteeism rates.

25.4.06 Audit Committee Meeting

17. Frank Cushnahan outlined key points arising from the 25.4.06 Audit Committee meeting, which was a one item agenda on Internal Audit's Plan for 2006/07. The Committee approved the plan as sufficient to meet assurance requirements and indicated that scheduling is suitable. The Committee also agreed to a review of corporate governance of OFMDFM's Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and Third Party Organisations and Jackie Kerr would take that forward. **Action: Jackie Kerr.**

Draft 2006-07 Business Plan

18. Deirdre Kenny tabled a draft 2006-07 Business Plan which had been compiled from inputs received from Directors. The Board approved the Plan for submission to the Minister for publication as early as possible in May 2006. **Action: Deirdre Kenny**
19. The Board also noted that the sub-group it commissioned at the March Board meeting would provide a paper to the September 2006 Board on recommendations for the way forward. **Action: Business Planning Sub-Group.**

Children and Young People 10-Year Strategy

20. Billy Gamble tabled the above paper for the Board to note the approach taken in the revision of the 10-year strategy for children and young people and the proposed date for publication and launch. The Board noted and agreed with the way forward proposed in the paper.

Departmental Brief

21. The Board agreed some minor amendments to the Departmental Brief for issue to Directors to initiate the team briefing process within the Department. The Board agreed with Deirdre Kenny's proposal that future Departmental Briefs should contain more information on personnel items.

Tour De Table

22. Billy Gamble reported that, following the death of the Commissioner for Children, Nigel Williams on 28 March 2006 the Chief Executive, Barney McNeny would be the interim Children's Commissioner until a permanent appointment is made.
23. Greg McConnell reported that the Local Government Boundaries Order had passed the Committee stages in the Houses of Commons and Lords and would return to the Lords for further debate and a possible vote on 26.4.06.
24. Denis McCartney reported on a case, which challenged the rules on standing for election which would be heard on 26.4.06.

Any Other Business

25. Nigel Hamilton reminded members that performance appraisal for senior civil servants were due for completion and he would be contacting Directors shortly to make arrangements for their appraisals.

DB 02/04/06

Date of Next Meeting

26. The next meeting would be held on Thursday 25.5.06 at the earlier starting time of 9.00 a.m. in the 5th Floor Conference Room E5.27, Castle Buildings.

Mark Higgins

Secretary

28 April 2006