

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

PRESENT: Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan,
Billy Gamble, George Gray, Stephen Grimason,
Jackie Kerr, Denis McCartney, Greg McConnell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Geoffrey Simpson (Secretary), Liz Elliott.

APOLOGIES: Deirdre Kenny

Minutes of Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2006 were agreed as amended.

Matters Arising

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

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly Issues

3. Rosalie Flanagan provided a brief summary of events at the Northern Ireland Assembly over the last few weeks, in particular the attempt to elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister. She also provided a brief overview of the main items discussed at the Good Government meeting on 24 May 2006.

Departmental Board Forward Plan

4. The Forward Plan was noted and no amendments were made

Resources

5. It was noted that bids for new staff could not be considered, and there was broad discussion about the areas where it may be possible to find the reductions needed to meet the Department's workforce planning commitments. Directors are to take forward, as appropriate, in relation to their own areas. **Action: Directors and Deirdre Kenny/Liz Elliott/Jackie Kerr.**

6. Consideration was given to whether it would be possible to contract out certain central support functions. This proposal was not supported but it was agreed that options for streamlining existing services would be explored where possible. **Action: Deirdre Kenny/Jackie Kerr.**

Finance and Accountability

7. Jackie Kerr tabled a number of papers as follows:

2005/06 Final Outturn

It was noted that there was still some concern regarding under-spending, and it was emphasised that surplus requirements must be declared as soon as possible.

Jackie Kerr encouraged Directors to closely monitor financial information at cost-centre level and emphasised the important contribution this can make to good budgetary control.

It was noted that the overall trend in relation to outturn against estimates was good, with variance improving from 12.4% in 2003/04 to 6.4% last year.

It was agreed that some resource funds should be surrendered during the June monitoring exercise and that the exact amount should be determined by Jackie Kerr, based on her knowledge of the position across the Department. **Action: Jackie Kerr.**

Finance Report - April 2006

Jackie Kerr provided a brief overview of the financial position at the end of April, but it was noted that accrual information made it difficult to conduct any detailed analysis at this early stage in the year.

Timetable for the Production of Resource Accounts, 2005/06

It was noted that preparation of the 2005/06 Resource Accounts was progressing well. Jackie Kerr outlined a number of issues which Finance Division is continuing to address.

NIAO Memorandum of Matters Arising

Jackie Kerr updated members on the current position. It was noted that most matters have now been fully resolved or are being addressed as appropriate.

Freedom of Information

8. Liz Elliott provided an update on the latest FOI requests being handled by the Department.

Managing Attendance

9. Liz Elliott reported that the absentee rate for OFMDFM had fallen from 4.2% to 3.7% during March, and that an improvement along these lines was to be expected at this time of year.

CURRENT ISSUES

10. It was noted that no current issues had been tabled for the meeting to allow more time for the discussion on resource issues.

PAPERS

Draft 2005/06 Annual Report

11. It was noted that the preparation of the 2005/06 Annual Report was well advanced. There was discussion about how to record the Department's key achievements in the Report and the following was agreed:
- A short overview of the roles and objectives of the Department to be included. **Action: Nigel Hamilton.**
 - Directors to submit a short note of key achievements (focussing on outputs) to Jackie Kerr for inclusion in the Report. **Action: All Directors.**
 - EIS to advise on presentational aspects of the Report. **Action: Stephen Grimason.**

Stewardship Statements 2005/06

12. Jackie Kerr highlighted a number of potential internal control issues for Directors to consider in relation to their respective Stewardship Statements before final consideration of the Statements by the Audit Committee on 20 June. **Action: Directors.**

Northern Ireland Bureau, Washington

13. There was a short discussion on a recent Internal Audit report on the NI Bureau in Washington. The matters arising are to be considered in the context of the Stewardship Statements.

Tour de Table

14. Denis McCartney summarised the main issues arising from a number of Judicial Reviews of interest to the work of the Department.
15. Billy Gamble provided an update on work aimed at removing offensive wall murals. He also advised on his Directorate's work in briefing the new Minister for Children and Young People.
16. Mary Bunting advised on some changes to personnel at the NSMC.
17. Rosalie Flanagan reported on work being undertaken with the NIO on devolution planning issues.
18. George Gray reported on the latest position on the legislative programme.
19. Greg McConnell gave a brief update on the project methodology supporting RPA implementation.

Any Other Business

DB 25/05/06

20. It was agreed that the September meeting of the Departmental Board (which the Minister hopes to attend) would take place on the morning of Tuesday, 19 September 2006. (NB: A start time of 10.00am has since been agreed with the Minister's office).

Date of Next Meeting

21. The next meeting will be held on Friday 23 June 2006 in Room E5.27 Castle Buildings commencing at 11.45am.

Geoffrey Simpson

25 May 2006