

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING  
ON 28 JUNE 2007**

**PRESENT:** John McMillen (Chair), Mary Bunting,  
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan, George Gray,  
Jackie Kerr, Deirdre Kenny, Paul Priestly and  
Cynthia Smith.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Joe Beattie (Head of IT Unit); Mark Higgins  
(Secretary); Finula Magowan (Finance Division) and  
Diarmuid McLean (Chief Executive, AccountNI).

**APOLOGIES:** Stephen Grimason and Nigel Hamilton.

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2007 were agreed as amended.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Action Points**

2. The Board noted and agreed changes to the current Action Points table for action points arising from the 26.4.07 and 31.5.07 Board meetings. A revised table would be issued with the minutes of the 28.6.07 meeting. **Action: Board Secretary.**

**STANDING ITEMS**

**Assembly/ Restoration Issues**

3. The Board agreed to cover the above matter under the item on the review of experience on handling Departmental, Executive and Assembly business.

### **Forward Plan**

4. The Board agreed additional items for the Forward Plan and an amended copy would be issued with the request to members for agenda items for the 26<sup>th</sup> July Board. **Action: Board Secretary.**

### **Resource Planning**

5. The Board noted a joint paper from Deirdre Kenny and Jackie Kerr which summarised the current position for the Department's Fit for Purpose target set by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the 2007-08 administration budget and resource reserve. The Board noted the action required by relevant directorates to finalise re-deployment arrangements for eight posts, (7.5 full time equivalents) that were previously identified for reduction and the need to find an additional 1.5 full time equivalents to achieve the Fit for Purpose target.
6. The Board had previously agreed that no new posts will be approved unless prior approval has been obtained from DFP Supply that the posts may be ring-fenced outside Fit for Purpose targets and Finance Division confirm that funding is available, or an offsetting reduction has been identified elsewhere
7. The Board also noted the current difficult administration budget position for 2007-08 and, taking account of pressures arising from Restoration and other areas, a shortfall in the administration budget is likely which would require re-assurance on funding support. Jackie Kerr summarised the key issues from a recent Finance Directors' meeting which discussed June

monitoring, Priorities and Budget for 2007-8 to 2009-10 and the in-year situation. Mrs Kerr explained that all indications were that in-year the financial position is extremely tight for all Departments with a limit, set by DFP, for underspends at a maximum of 2% of budget.

### **Financial Reports**

8. Jackie Kerr's paper on financial outturn up to and including May 2007 showed that, against profiled budget for administration, resource and capital expenditure, no variances are giving rise for concern at this early stage of the year.
  
9. The Board noted that OFMDFM's prompt payment performance for the month of May was 81% against a target of 95%. Average performance for the year to date is 88% which is 7% lower than the year to date performance for the May 2006 average. Jackie Kerr explained the reduction in the prompt payment figure was caused by DFP closing numerous account codes at the end of the 2006/07 financial year and it was agreed to provide the Board with the percentage figure that would have been achieved when the effect of DFPs action was excluded. **Action: Jackie Kerr.**
  
10. The Board noted that the Department had met the faster closing deadline of 11 June 2007 for the production of Resource Accounts 2006-07.

11. Jackie Kerr reported a suspected fraud case and that the process stipulated in Department's Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan was being followed.

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

12. Deirdre Kenny reported on an increase in the number and complexity of FOI requests. The Board noted that an update on FOI issues is included in the June Departmental Brief, with emphasis placed on the need to prioritise FOI requests by business areas and the need for effective record keeping.

### **Managing Attendance**

13. Deirdre Kenny reported that the latest absenteeism figures for the Department for April 2007 was 3.7% which continued to be one of the lowest in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

### **Review of Experience on Handling Departmental, Executive and Assembly Business**

14. Rosalie Flanagan provided a synopsis of the role of Executive Services Directorate in supporting Ministers on Assembly and Executive matters. She explained that her Directorate also fulfilled the departmental liaison role on both Assembly matters and the legislative programme. In other Departments, these roles are provided by Central Management. She also described the processes involved in handling Assembly Questions and debates, providing briefing and the involvement of Special Advisers. Mrs Flanagan thanked colleagues for their support and assistance and members reported on their experience and involvement to date. The Board noted that the summer recess

would provide an opportunity to review processes and in that context it was agreed that Executive Services Directorate would arrange a workshop for officials and Special Advisers in July to focus on key process issues including financial matters. **Action: Rosalie Flanagan.**

### **Audit Committee**

15. The Board noted that the minutes of the latest Audit Committee meeting on the 6 June would be circulated to Board members as soon as all comments had been received from Committee members and attendees. **Action: Board Secretary.**

### **AccountNI**

16. Dairmuid McLean, Chief Executive of AccountNI provided the Board with an update on that reform project and the timetable for its introduction. He explained that the process was moving from Product Test phase in June to Integration Test, Mock Conversion Test and Performance Test from June to September 2007. Pilot training, Senior Civil Service training and Departmental staff training would follow consecutively from August up to the go-live date of the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Mr McLean requested that staff are released for relevant training as the opportunities for training after the go-live date would be very limited.
17. The Board noted that, in the context of AccountNI, the Department is intrinsically linked with the Department of Finance and Personnel, so there are risks associated with two systems and managing down time during the transition period between

the current systems and the go-live date for AccountNI. The Board thanked Mr Mclean for his update, noted the progress achieved to date and wished him success with the remaining timetable which the Board supported. Directors were asked to note the importance of releasing their staff for AccountNI training.

### **Devolution of Justice**

18. The Board noted a paper tabled by John McMillen which reported progress on the project set up for the Department to plan for the devolution of justice powers if it proceeds, in May 2008 as envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement. The paper outlined a possible future role for OFMDFM if devolution of policing and justice powers proceeds. The Board noted the progress made so far by the project team. George Gray raised a number of scenarios regarding possible transfer of functions to the Department or a Department of Justice and it was agreed that those points would be fed back to the project team. **Action: John McMillen.**

### **Business Change Programme**

19. Deirdre Kenny tabled a report which summarised the various priority 1 projects within the Business Change Programme and advised that the key point to note was the timetable for the HRConnect project. Mrs Kenny explained that the date for Release 1.0, of the HRConnect project, External Recruitment will now move from June to August 2007 and the pilot rollout of Release 1.1, which covers employee relations, will move from August to the autumn, 2007.

## **Learning and Development**

20. A paper by Deirdre Kenny advised the Board to note the high level of training cancellations by OFMDFM staff for the 2006/07 year and the resultant cost to OFMDFM. The Board agreed that Directors should note the poor training attendance record of OFMDFM compared to other departments and signal to their staff that training is important and non attendance, without giving adequate notice, is unacceptable. It was also agreed that line managers should ensure that staff are released for agreed training or provide adequate notice of cancellation to the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL) and the Training and Development Unit to allow the training place to be filled from the waiting list.

## **E-Mail Migration**

21. Joe Beattie, Head of Information Unit provided a summary outline of a paper on E-mail migration from Lotus Notes to Microsoft Outlook. The paper sought Board endorsement for the email migration project to commence at the earlier date of 6<sup>th</sup> August 2007, that all existing content is migrated in Stage 1 and that the introduction of Information Management policies are phased in during the period September to November 2007.
22. Mr Beattie advised that all existing content (including calendars and contacts) will be transferred across from Notes to the Outlook environment. He reported that all Notes accounts, including shared mailboxes, will be closed at the end of the migration so that staff cannot continue to use these accounts (though every mailbox will remain accessible for a period of at

least 6 months for backup purposes e.g. in the event that an important historical email was deleted accidentally in the new Outlook environment). Information Management policies for automated restrictions will be introduced during the period September to November 2007.

23. The Board agreed the approach to migration outlined in the paper, i.e. a two Stage approach with Stage 1 representing the migration from Lotus Notes to the DFP Exchange and Stage 2 is onwards to the SSC Exchange. The Board agreed that Information Management policies should be developed and to begin the introduction of mailbox restrictions on a phased basis as part of Phase 2 of the RecordsNI project, probably no earlier than January 2008. It was also agreed that Directors highlight the importance to their staff of the need to respond promptly to the staff questionnaire that will be issued immediately to establish training needs for and leave arrangements during August and September 2007.

#### **Departmental Brief**

24. The Board approved some minor amendments to the June Departmental Brief and agreed to its circulation to Directors to initiate the team briefing process, including the delivery of local briefs within the Department. **Action: Directors**

#### **Any Other Business**

##### **Staff Annual Reports**

25. Deidre Kenny reported that 170 annual staff reports are outstanding and requested that Directors ensure they are

completed as soon possible for return to DFP Personnel. **Action: Directors.**

### **Special Bonus Scheme 2007-08**

26. Deirdre Kenny circulated, for the Board's information, a tabular list of special bonus scheme awards made to staff for the 2007-08 year to date. The table listed the amounts and dates of awards by grade level and business area.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

27. The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for 10.45 a.m. on Thursday, 26 July 2007 in the 4<sup>th</sup> floor conference room, E4.02 Castle Buildings.

**Mark Higgins**

11 July 2007