

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 19 OCTOBER 2006**

- PRESENT:** Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, George Gray, Stephen Grimason,
Deirdre Kenny, John McMillen.
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Ian McFarlane, Gerry Mulligan, Stewart Johnston,
Geoffrey Simpson (Secretary)
- APOLOGIES:** Billy Gamble, Rosalie Flanagan, Jackie Kerr

TRIBUTE

1. Nigel Hamilton paid tribute to Denis McCartney following his recent death and the Board observed a short period of silence in his memory.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2006 were agreed as amended.

MATTERS ARISING

3. Deirdre Kenny advised that a small working group had been established to oversee arrangements for the Departmental Conference and that a provisional date of 12 February 2007 had been set.

CSR 2007

4. The Board discussed the Secretary of State's recent letter to Permanent Secretaries regarding the CSR 2007 exercise. Consideration was given to the implications for the Department's business planning process, and it was noted that the deadline for reply (15 November) presented certain difficulties for the existing business planning timetable.

5. John McMillen advised that further guidance was expected from DFP, and it was agreed that this should be circulated to Board members along with a suitable commissioning note to all directors for input as appropriate. It was also agreed that the Board should have a short meeting with Minister Hanson to agree the Departmental response. **Action: John McMillen, Deirdre Kenny, Iain McFarlane.**

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly Issues

6. Stewart Johnston provided a read out of the recent St Andrews agreement and its implications for NI Departments. The Board discussed the possible outworkings of the agreement within OFMDFM over the months ahead.

Forward Plan

7. It was agreed that "Restoration Planning" should be included as a standing item on the Forward Plan. **Action: Deirdre Kenny (for inclusion on the Forward Plan), Rosalie Flanagan (for updates as appropriate).**

Resource Planning

8. Deirdre Kenny reported that the Department is on target to achieve its Fit for Purpose targets. She also advised that it was intended that future Resource Planning submissions to the Board would be shorter and, as far as possible, would be presented in tabular form. The board were content with this proposal.

Financial Report

9. Iain McFarlane presented a paper setting out:
 - summary financial outturn information to 30th September;
 - summary Departmental Reserve levels;
 - Summary information on the October Monitoring exercise;
 - Summary information on the Department's CSR 07 proposals; and,
 - Summary information on Prompt Payment performance
10. The importance of the December Monitoring exercise was noted by the Board, and it was agreed that the November meeting should include a full discussion on the matter with the aim of avoiding, as far as possible, a situation in which funds would be surrendered later in the financial year.

Fraud

11. Iain McFarlane advised that there were no current issues to report.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

12. Deirdre Kenny advised that there were no current issues to report.

Managing Attendance

13. Deirdre Kenny reported that the Department's record on managing attendance remained amongst the best in the NICS. However, she advised that DFP would shortly be issuing further guidance on managing attendance which emphasised that early intervention, particular in cases on stress related illness, can help reduce periods of sick absence. The guidance will be circulated to managers in due course but, in the meantime, Directors were encouraged to contact Personnel Branch if they had any queries regarding how best to manage instances of sick absence.

PAPERS

PQ Performance Statistics

14. Stewart Johnston presented a paper on statistics for answering PQs, which showed that 42% of questions for OFMDFM were answered on time. It was noted that over 65% of those answered late missed the deadline by only one or two days and, therefore, that a small improvement in turn around times would significantly improve overall performance. Directors agreed to

look at performance in their own areas with a view to making their processes as efficient as possible. **Action: All Directors.**

Business Change Programme

15. Deirdre Kenny provided a brief update on OFMDFM Business Change Programme and advised on arrangements for capturing data for the staff directory. Deirdre Kenny undertook to consider adding e-mail addresses to the data captured. The Board agreed that the completion of the data capture forms should be considered mandatory for all staff.

Exercise Winter Willow

16. Deirdre Kenny outlined arrangements for participating in a national pandemic influence exercise (Winter Willow) in January and February 2007. It was agreed that the Board would offer its full support and members agreed to play a role as required in the exercise. There was some discussion on implications for Northern Ireland of emergency arrangements arising from its geographical position as physically separate from the UK mainland and with a land border.

OFMDFM Business Continuity Plans

17. Deirdre Kenny presented a paper which included a draft Business Continuity Plan for OFMDFM, and advised that the draft Plan had been approved by the Department's Emergency Management Steering Group. It was noted that the Plan would now be circulated to all Directorates along with details of latest emergency planning assumptions as a basis for

Directorate/Divisional/Branch plans to be brought up to date.

Action: Deirdre Kenny

Special Bonus Scheme

18. Deirdre Kenny updated the Board on the Department's use of the Special Bonus Scheme. It was agreed that Directors should seek to use the Scheme to the maximum extent possible to reward good work in their respective areas.

Departmental Brief

19. The Departmental Brief was approved by the Board for issue across the Department. **Action: Deirdre Kenny**

TOUR DE TABLE/ANY OTHER BUSINESS

20. Stephen Grimason provided an update on government advertising policy.
21. Frank Cushnahan reported on a Cabinet Office presentation on Capability Reviews and there followed a short discussion on the possible implications for NI Departments in the context of CSR 07, business planning and political developments.
22. Deirdre Kenny reported on the success of the recent MacMillan Coffee morning (over £750 was raised). She also provided a brief update on IIP matters, and advised that work on the corporate governance review had paused pending the outcome of the NIAO review of governance arrangements.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23. The next monthly meeting of the Board is scheduled for 9.00a.m. on Thursday, 16 November. The meeting will deal with routine business first and then take the form of a business planning workshop. At this stage, it is planned that it will be held off-site at a venue yet to be determined.

24. As agreed in para 5 above, the Board is also due to meet with Minister Hanson to agree the Departmental response to CSR 07. Directors will be advised of a date for this meeting in due course. **Action: John McMillen, Deirdre Kenny, Iain McFarlane.**

**GEOFFREY SIMPSON
19 OCTOBER 2006**