

**MINUTES OF THE OFMDFM DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
ON 16 NOVEMBER 2006**

PRESENT: Nigel Hamilton (Chair), Mary Bunting,
Frank Cushnahan, Rosalie Flanagan, Billy Gamble,
Stephen Grimason, Deirdre Kenny, John McMillen and
Cynthia Smith.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Higgins (Secretary) Alan Shields and
Deirdre Teague.

APOLOGIES: George Gray and Jackie Kerr.

Thanks

1. Nigel Hamilton thanked Frank Cushnahan for hosting the Board meeting in the Harbour Commissioners Office to facilitate the business planning workshop.

WELCOME

2. Nigel Hamilton welcomed Cynthia Smith, to her first Departmental Board, as the new of Director of Equality and wished her success in her new role. He also thanked Billy Gamble on behalf of the Board for his invaluable work as Acting Director of Equality while the Director post was vacant.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2006 were agreed as amended.

MATTERS ARISING

4. Matters arising were covered under the relevant agenda item.

STANDING ITEMS

Assembly/ Restoration Issues

5. Rosalie Flanagan provided an update on recent developments in respect of the St Andrews agreement, including related forthcoming legislation which would be debated in the House of Commons and House of Lords in the current week. The Board discussed the possible implications for NI Departments if restoration was to occur and outworkings within OFMDFM over the months ahead.

Forward Plan

6. It was agreed that the Forward Plan would be amended to reflect the impact of any emerging restoration issues as outlined in paragraph 3 above.

Resource Planning

7. Deirdre Kenny and Iain McFarlane tabled a combined HR/Financial Analysis paper, incorporating workforce planning and resource planning updates. Deirdre Kenny reported that the Department was on target to achieve its Fit for Purpose targets. Mrs Kenny explained that if all vacant Departmental posts, including restoration vacancies, are filled and all easements are realised in the current and 2007/08 financial years, that would have a significant impact on administration budgets should restoration of a devolved administration occur. The Board noted

the disproportionate impact restoration would have on OFMDFM in comparison to other NI Departments and it was agreed that John McMillen would engage with Bruce Robinson, Department of Finance and Personnel regarding those restoration/vacancy issues. **Action: John McMillen.**

8. Nigel Hamilton emphasised the need to ensure that the Assembly is up and running to meet restoration requirements and that he, the Board, and Executive Services Directorate had specific responsibilities in that area.

Financial Report

9. John McMillen summarised a paper tabled by Iain McFarlane, Finance Division. The paper summarised the financial outturn information to 31st October 2006, Departmental Reserve levels, October 2006 monitoring exercise outcomes, information on the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007 submission to the Secretary of State and the latest prompt payment performance. The Board noted an improvement in the Department's prompt payment performance for October 2006 at 98% against a target of 95% of payments made within 30 days of invoices being received.
10. The Board discussed key issues regarding administration cost underspends, resource variance against profiled budgets and the need to continually manage the Department's administration cost reserve. The Board also noted the second set of accruals

based management reports/ accounts for quarter ending September 2006 tabled by Finance Division for their information.

Fraud

11. John McMillen informed the Board about a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was formally signed by Nigel Hamilton on behalf of the Northern Ireland Public Sector and Sir Hugh Orde on behalf of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on the 30 October 2006.
12. The MOU was produced by the NICS Fraud Forum and it sets out a basic framework for the working relationship between the PSNI and the Public Sector in respect of the investigation and prosecution of fraud cases. Its aim is to ensure greater consistency in the way fraud cases are investigated across the range of public sector bodies and a more targeted approach to criminal prosecution cases.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

13. Deirdre Kenny provided a verbal update on some current FOI cases and the Board noted that there was a notable increase in FOI requests in recent weeks, particularly from the media on a wide range of matters.

Managing Attendance

14. Deirdre Kenny reported that although the Department's record on managing attendance remained amongst the best in the NICS there was a rise from 3.4% in July and August, to 4.9% in

September due mainly to long term absences associated with hospital procedures. The Board noted the figures and emphasised its support for the Department's managing attendance policy, in line with NICS guidelines and which included close working between Personnel and line managers, return to work interviews and which made use of Occupational Health Service advice and guidance in appropriate cases.

PAPERS

NI Public Sector & Civil Service Reform Programme

15. John McMillen tabled the NI Public Sector and Civil Service Reform Programme, quarterly report as at 30.9.06, which requires actions on inputs from Departments. Mr McMillen explained that the latter information will provide Permanent Secretaries Group (PSG) with an update on progress and major issues affecting the successful delivery of the programme and addresses issues such as Financial Reporting, Risk Management and Capability (Benefits Management). The quarterly report included an overview, latest news, risk profile and 3 month forward look to 31.12.06 for both the Public Sector Reform Programme and Common NI Infrastructure Programme.

16. Mr McMillen explained that OFMDFM will, in common with all Departments, be impacted by the Reform Programme and many of the programme's projects require actions on inputs from the Department. Deidre Kenny also presented an illustrative communication plan for the HR Connect initiative.

17. The Board noted the key aspects of the programme and discussed the critical issues in terms of management and control of projects, in particular the Account NI programme, not least in the context of restoration of a devolved administration. The Board agreed that the risk management aspects of the programme should be reflected in the Department's corporate risk register and that concerns about the timetable for Account NI should be raised with the senior responsible officer for that programme. **Action: John McMillen.**

Tour de Table

18. Mary Bunting advised that the terms of office of current members of Boards of North/South Bodies will expire in December 2006 and the way forward was under consideration.
19. Cynthia Smith reported on the launch by the Secretary of State on 13 November 2006 of "Lifetime Opportunities", the Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland. The strategy which would be debated by the Northern Ireland Grand Committee at their next meeting in Belfast on 12 December 2006.
20. Stephen Grimason updated the meeting on current Judicial Reviews concerning Government advertising and planning applications.

Any Other Business

21. No other business was raised by members.

Corporate and Business Planning

22. The Board spent the remainder of the meeting discussing future corporate and business planning in the Department for 2007 to 2010. This session was facilitated by Deidre Teague and Alan Shields from the Department of Finance and Personnel, Business Consultancy Service who assisted the Board in determining high level strategic aims.

23. The Board produced a number of high level strategic aims and agreed that they would be disseminated to Directors with a view to drafting an operational plan with supporting high-level objectives which would in turn be supported by appropriate targets that captured the various key activities of directorates. It was agreed that those objectives and targets should reflect the Shared Future initiative and the Government's three cross-cutting priority strategies, i.e. the Children and Young People Strategy, Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy. **Action: Directors.**

24. It was agreed that the business planning sub-group will then develop an initial draft plan from inputs received from Directors for the Board's approval. The agreed draft operational plan would then be submitted to the Minister who has indicated that he wishes to be kept involved. **Action: Directors/ Business Planning Sub-Group.**

Mark Higgins

23 November 2006