

**MINUTES OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY, 22 AUGUST 2008
IN THE GLASSHOUSE, STORMONT CASTLE
AT 8.45 AM**

Present: Bruce Robinson – Chair
Derek Baker
Will Haire
Edgar Jardine
Gerry Lavery
Gregg McConnell
Andrew McCormick
Barney McGahan
Paul Priestly
Stephen Quinn
Paul Simpson

In Attendance: Oswyn Paulin
Stephen Grimason
Neill Jackson
John McMillen
Jim Hamilton
Tom Kennedy } Agenda Item 7
Colm Shannon }
Pauline Boyle - Secretary

1. Apologies: Aideen McGinley
Malcolm McKibbin
Leo O'Reilly
Stephen Peover
Alan Shannon
Paul Sweeney
Rosalie Flanagan

2. Minutes of Meeting held on Friday 15 August 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 August were agreed with one minor amendment.

3. Matters Arising

Public Inquiries

At the PSG meeting on 1 August, Ossie Paulin said he would circulate UK guidance on public inquiries. He confirmed the guidance has not been finalised at present. Following discussion it was agreed that Executive Services Branch in

OFMDFM would be best placed to draft guidance on public inquiries for the Northern Ireland Executive.

[Action: Neill Jackson]

Olympic Flag

Bruce Robinson confirmed that advice issued from DCAL to Permanent Secretaries on 15 August on flying of the Olympic handover flag.

Chief Executives Forum

John McMillen circulated a note on financial provision to the Chief Executives Forum. OFMDFM took responsibility for payment in respect of the NICS contribution to the CEF in the past. A decision was made in April 2008 that Departments and Agencies would be responsible for payment of their own subscriptions and the CEF has billed Departments broadly in line with the size of the organisation. PSG agreed it was up to individual Departments and Agencies to make the decision on payment.

4. Executive & Assembly Update

Neill Jackson informed PSG that the First Minister returns from leave on Tuesday 26 August. He said a review of Oral Assembly questions had been completed with a commonality of issues and recommendations. He expected a submission would be put to Ministers soon on the Legislative Programme.

Bruce Robinson informed colleagues that a new Special Adviser, Peter King has been appointed for the First Minister's office.

Bruce also informed colleagues that a new International Relations Division has been set up in OFMDFM headed by Debbie Sweeney.

Bruce said that John McMillen has been asked to undertake an update on progress on ISNI capital expenditure in view of concerns about the state of the economy and he asked all departments to ensure the information on the SIB database was up to date so that any discussion prompted by the update can be well informed.

Bruce updated colleagues on arrangements put in place last weekend following the flooding in Northern Ireland. He said the Civil Contingencies Branch in OFMDFM were terrific in bringing the key services together ie NI Water, Rivers Agency and Roads Service. An emergency meeting was held on Sunday 17 August at 12.30 in Stormont Castle: this was followed by a meeting with Ministers at 3.30. Bruce asked colleagues to take back the collective thanks of PSG to all those people involved in the emergency planning arrangements.

[Action: PSG]

Gerry Lavery said DARD met with the Ulster Farmers' Union on Thursday evening 21 August to discuss the impact of the recent flooding on the farming community particularly those who have lost potato, maize and winter wheat crops. He said a team of experts would conduct a survey today Friday 22 August.

Bruce Robinson said it was important all this work is co-ordinated and felt it would be best placed in DFP.

[Action: Derek Baker]

5. FOI

Nothing to report on FOI.

6. Graduate Recruitment

Paul Priestly said a review of graduate recruitment was launched with the agreement of PSG in February 2008 and a copy of his report was circulated to colleagues for today's meeting. Following discussion PSG unanimously supported Paul's recommendations in the report and agreed to take forward the work on conducting a pilot of the revised scheme. Bruce Robinson thanked Paul Priestly and Derek Baker for the rapid progress that had been made since February on this issue.

7. NI Direct

Bruce Robinson introduced Tom Kennedy and Colm Shannon who are taking forward NI Direct. He said Tom has specific responsibility for coordinating the whole programme and Colm's focus is on the NI Direct web presence.

Their presentation underscored a number of key aspects to the work viz:-

- (a) It would be taken forward initially by phone and web and the information would be the same in both.
- (b) The hours of operating for the single number would be 8 am to 8 pm Monday-Friday and 8 am to 1 pm on Saturdays.
- (c) The incremental rollout is planned with four anchor tenants – Planning Service, DARD, Land & Property Service and General Registry.
- (d) The NI Direct approach to the online channel would be largely based on the DirectGov initiative which is running successfully in England.
- (e) One online source of information for the citizen instead of the large number of individual sites which run at present for each Department.
- (f) Information would be organised in a way to suit the citizen under 16 themes.
- (g) There will be 16 franchise owners who will manage and develop their franchise and a central editorial team would be responsible for co-ordination, management and marketing of the new site.

Bruce Robinson said considerable work would be necessary to ensure NICS meets the March 2009 deadline for the launch of NI Direct Online and asked colleagues to discuss with their Departmental Boards.

[Action: PSG]

8. **Tour de Table**

Water Charging

Paul Priestly updated PSG on Water Charging.

Special Adviser

Paul Simpson said a new Special Adviser, Graham Craig has been appointed for Minister Wilson.

PSG Awayday

Bruce Robinson said he had circulated papers for the PSG Awayday on 4-5 September and asked deputies to draw this to the attention of their Permanent Secretaries on return from annual leave in preparation for the Awayday.

[Action: Deputies]

PAULINE BOYLE

26 August 2008