

**MINUTES OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 31 AUGUST 2007
IN THE GLASSHOUSE, STORMONT CASTLE
AT 8.45 AM**

Present: Nigel Hamilton
Robson Davison
Andrew McCormick
Aideen McGinley
Malcolm McKibbin
Stephen Quinn
Bruce Robinson
Alan Shannon
Paul Simpson
David Sterling
Paul Sweeney

In Attendance: John Dowdall } Agenda Item 4
David Thomson }
Rosalie Flanagan
John McMillen
Oswyn Paulin
Debbie Sweeney - Secretary

1. **Apologies:** Will Haire
Stephen Peover
Stephen Grimason

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 17 August 2007**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 August were agreed.

3. **Matters Arising**

Foot and Mouth Disease

Malcolm McKibbin said the threat continued to decrease and contingency plans adjusted accordingly. DARD were working with DAFF and DEFRA to review lessons learnt.

Assembly and Executive Update

Rosalie Flanagan updated PSG with the Executive Meetings timetable. Rosalie said the Executive Strategy would be held on 6 September at Galgorm Manor. Rosalie asked that she and Mary Bunting be informed of any Ministerial visits to the ROI and be copied into any briefing.

[Action: Perm Secs to note]

4. **PAC/NIAO Update**

Nigel Hamilton welcomed John Dowdall to PSG.

John updated PSG on the PAC and their proposed timetable of business. He said that he was trying to ensure an element of flexibility within their timetable to enable them to be responsive to issues if necessary. John said the Committee were keen to hold meetings outside of Parliament Buildings.

John told PSG there were no immediate, generic issues on the audit front. The membership of NIAO staff on Audit Committees was proving successful.

David Thomson said the first MOR on the Belfast to Bangor Upgrade would be published the following week. John Dowdall said the Committee were going through old MORs and will ask for updates.

5. NICS Reform Costs

Bruce referred to his paper on NICS Reform Costs. He said DFP Supply teams will be liaising with SROs to discuss the total forecast project baselines and proposed transfers for all projects from Departments over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 for consideration in agreeing Departmental settlements as part of the Budget 2007 process.

It was agreed the issue would be raised at PSG on 7 September to give Permanent Secretaries the opportunity to discuss issues of principle with their Finance Directors.

[PSG to note]

6. Tour de Table

RPA

Andrew McCormick updated PSG on RPA implementation.

Farmers Income

Malcolm McKibbin said that a report by the "Red Meat Task Force" would highlight very real economic pressures on farmers particularly in the beef and hill sheep sectors.

UPRG Funding

Alan Shannon updated PSG on UPRG funding.

Rural Planning

David Sterling said Mike Thompson had written to Permanent Secretaries on 29 August regarding the Review of Rural Planning. The first meeting of the Inter Departmental Group on Rural Planning would take place on 10 September. David said Mike would be happy to discuss any issues with Departments in advance of the meeting.

[PSG to note]

Invitation

It was agreed that Bruce Robinson and Stephen Quinn would attend the Belfast Chamber of Commerce Dinner on 9 October 2007.

Permanent Secretary Posts

Nigel Hamilton informed PSG that the DFP post would be trawled later that day and the DRD post advertised on 11 September.

Next Week's PSG

The meeting on 7 September will be HR PSG.

D A SWEENEY
31 August 2007