

**MINUTES OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 4 APRIL, 2008
IN THE GLASSHOUSE, STORMONT CASTLE
AT 8.45 AM**

Present: Stephen Quinn - Chair
Catherine Bell
Will Haire
Barney McGahan
Malcolm McKibbin
Leo O'Reilly
Stephen Peover
Paul Priestly
Paul Sweeney

In Attendance: Derek Baker - Agenda item
Rosalie Flanagan
John McMillen
Oswyn Paulin
Mark Higgins - Secretary

1. **Apologies:** Sir Nigel Hamilton, Andrew McCormick, Aideen McGinley,
Bruce Robinson, Alan Shannon

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on Friday 14 March 2008**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March were agreed as amended.

3. **Matters Arising**

SCS Management Issues

Minuted separately.

End Year Flexibility

Rosalie Flanagan reported that the issue raised by Leo O'Reilly in relation to the Executive meeting agenda item on end year flexibility had been resolved.

4. **Executive & Assembly Update**

Rosalie Flanagan provided an outline of the key agenda items for Executive meeting scheduled for 10 April, including a Programme for Government monitoring framework and the Victims Bill.

5. Economic Conference Update

Stephen Quinn provided an update on arrangements for the Economic Conference which were progressing well. Minister Dodds could mention this under AOB at the next Executive meeting.

[Action: Stephen Quinn]

6. Account NI

Leo O'Reilly provided an update on the operation of Account NI over the first 4 months of operation. A lessons learned review has addressed the areas for improvement. The meeting discussed latter and other key issues around training and audit. It was agreed that DFP would provide a further paper to PSG.

[Action: Leo O'Reilly]

7. Top 200 Event

The Chairman advised that Sir Nigel Hamilton had requested that consideration be given to attendance of NI Permanent Secretaries at the next Top 200 event on 8 and 9 May 2008 in Sunningdale. Representation would be agreed at PSG on 11 April.

8. Civil Service Commissioners Selection Process Audit

Derek Baker outlined the purpose of his paper to PSG on the consideration of the NICS response to the Selection Processes Audit carried out on behalf of the Civil Service Commissioners. He explained that Stephen Peover had raised a number of concerns about audit and suggested that it should be the subject of discussion at PSG. It was agreed that CPG could respond positively to the audit's recommendations in the area of improved documentation. It was also agreed that recruitment and assessment policies, particularly for senior competitions, should be considered in the first instance by the PSG Sub-Committee on Training and Selection.

[Action: Derek Baker]

9. Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill

Derek Baker reported that a White Paper and an associated draft Constitutional Renewal Bill had been published in the previous week. The proposals cover a wide range of issues which are largely reserved matters but, so far as civil service reform is concerned, specifically exclude the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Courts Service. Consideration would need to be given as to whether Northern Ireland should follow suit with this proposed legislation.

10. HR Connect

Derek Baker provided an update on the next stage of HRConnect.

11. **Tour de Table**

Varney Report 2

Leo O'Reilly advised the Chief Secretary would be meeting with the Finance Minister and that DFP would endeavour to get the Varney Team to share the draft paper with relevant departments before this.

Conflict Transformation Initiative (CTI)

Oswyn Paulin advised that the hearing for the CTI case had been postponed to June 2008.

Barroso Task Force Report

John McMillen reported that the Barroso Task Force Report on modernising the Northern Ireland economy would be launched in Belfast on 14 April by Commissioner Hubner.

Ministerial Visits To USA

John McMillen requested that Departments ensure they inform and involve the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington at an early stage of any planned Ministerial visits to the USA.

Co-ownership Scheme

Barney McGahan reported that his Department's Minister was proactive in ensuring that the public were aware that the above scheme had not closed despite recent coverage to the contrary.

NI Housing Executive Efficiency Savings

Barney McGahan reported that recent media coverage of NIHE savings had not provided a fully accurate assessment of future staffing levels.

Central Services Agency

Barney McGahan advised that the CSA had been de-agentised from 31 March 2008 to become a division within DSD.

Fishing Industry

Malcolm McKibbin updated the meeting on issues concerned with financial assistance to fishermen and the Northern Salmon case.

Local Government Boundaries Commissioner

Stephen Peover updated on the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

European Regional Development Fund Programmes

Leo O'Reilly advised that there would be a joint event on 14 April to launch the Barroso Task Force Report, referred to previously by John McMillen, and the European Regional Development Fund Programmes

Local Government Boundaries Bill

Stephen Peover updated PSG on the progress of the Local Government Boundaries Bill.

Water Charges

Paul Priestly updated PSG on the current position regarding the process for decision making in respect of Water Charging.

Rapid Transit

Paul Priestly updated PSG on a forthcoming report in the near future on the feasibility of a rapid transit transport system for Belfast.

Invitations

Leo O'Reilly advised that Bruce Robinson had accepted an invitation to attend a BDO Stoy Hayward event on 23 April to celebrate 20 years of business in Belfast.

Will Haire reported on an invitation he had received from Queen's University to attend the Mitchell conference on 22 and 23 May and an invitation from Business in the Community to attend a Gala Awards dinner on 29 May.

12. Next PSG Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Friday 11 April.

MARK HIGGINS
8 April 2008