

**MINUTES OF PERMANENT SECRETARY GROUP MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 16 JUNE 2006 IN ROOM GD14, STORMONT CASTLE
AT 8.45 AM**

Present: Nigel Hamilton
Doreen Brown
John Hunter
Andrew McCormick
Aideen McGinley
Stephen Quinn
Bruce Robinson
Eddie Rooney
Alan Shannon
Paul Sweeney
Pat Toal

In Attendance: Stephen Grimason
Rosalie Flanagan
Fiona Hepper } - Agenda Item 4
Paul Robinson }
Colm Shannon } - Agenda Item 5
Stephen Magee }
Debbie Sweeney - Secretary

1. **Apologies:** Denis McCartney
Gerry McGinn
Stephen Peover
Will Haire
Nick Perry

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 9 June**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June were agreed.

3. **Matters Arising**

Ireland v England Cricket Match

Nigel Hamilton congratulated all involved in the organisation of the Ireland v England cricket match held at the Pavilion Complex, especially the ground staff, for the excellent state of the pitch. Paul Sweeney said it was an excellent showcase for the facility.

Assembly Update

Rosalie Flanagan updated PSG on the week's Assembly Business.

4. **Way Forward: NI Telecoms Policy**

Fiona Hepper said that telecommunications was a privatised and competitive industry and Northern Ireland had a world-class telecoms infrastructure. Telecoms costs in NI were the same as most other parts of the UK and amongst the most competitive in Europe.

The advantages of telecoms in NI is the 100% availability of entry level Broadband and the two competing province-wide networks. Currently there are 250,000 Broadband accounts, 33% of households and 36% of businesses, and in each of the last five months, NI has had the highest growth in take-up rates of all regions. Fiona outlined the telecoms developments in Wales, Scotland and Rol.

Fiona set out the proposed way forward to develop telecoms policy in NI and to ensure that the advantage the province had in the telecoms industry is maintained and expanded to give a competitive advantage.

Nigel Hamilton thanked Fiona and Paul for their detailed presentation on telecoms policy. He emphasised the importance of NI maintaining its competitive edge and to stay ahead of other parts of the UK and Europe.

5. **Strategic Review of EIS including Implementation of the Advertising Review**

(i) Strategic Review

Colm Shannon outlined the recommendations of the Strategic Review of the Executive Information Service which was carried out by Delivery and Innovation Division.

The main recommendations were that:

- the current EIS structure should remain in place with Information Offices retained within Departments;
- Corporate Communications Units within Departments should deliver the full range of communications functions;
- annual reporting for PIO staff should become joint responsibility for EIS and Departments;
- EIS should take responsibility for NICS internal communications;
- EIS should liaise with Departmental Senior Management Teams to reinforce the importance of involving Information Offices in policy development.

DID also recommended that EIS should have DRC responsibility for all Departmental EIS.

PSG endorsed the Strategic Review recommendations but asked that Colm revisit the DRC transfer recommendation with Departments and return to PSG with an update.

[Action: Colm Shannon]

(ii) Advertising Review

Stephen Grimason said he saw the Advertising Review as part of the Reform Programme. The system required the development of an integrated communications plan for all Government Departments linked directly to the Programme for Government/Budget priorities.

The Advertising Review recommended the establishment of an Advertising Review Shared Service Centre by 1 April 2007.

Colm set out the resourcing implications and the projected savings to be made by the formation of the SSC. PSG agreed in principle to the recommendations to establish the Advertising Shared Service Centre and the approach to funding.

6. **Permanent Secretaries: Guidelines for Media Activity**

Nigel Hamilton drew PSG attention to Howell James' letter of 18 May 2006 on Guidelines for Media Activity by Permanent Secretaries. Nigel said he would respond to Howell James.

[Action: Nigel Hamilton]

7. **Handling HR/RPA Issues**

John Hunter updated PSG on HR/RPA handling issues. CPG had developed a flowchart which would be circulated following the next steering group meeting which will set out a co-ordinated approach to RPA/HR issues.

8. **Tour de Table**

CHX Visit

Bruce Robinson updated PSG on the visit by the Chancellor to Northern Ireland on Monday 19 June.

June Monitoring Round

Bruce Robinson thanked Departments for prompt returns for the June Monitoring Round. He said that his Department would be discussing figures and pressures with Finance Directors.

Bruce said in order to assist Departments, arrangements would be made for bi-laterals with Departments to discuss their financial management practices.

[Action: Bruce Robinson]

FIFA Passports

Paul Sweeney informed PSG that the passport situation had been resolved.

Education and Library Boards

Eddie Rooney updated PSG on the Education and Library Boards.

PAC

Nigel Hamilton passed on PSG's good wishes to Paul Sweeney, Will Haire and their staff who would be appearing before PAC the following week.

RPA Briefing

Nigel said he would be briefing the Irish on RPA on Thursday 22 June.

Building Top 200 Community

It was agreed the following Permanent Secretaries would attend the Building Top 200 Community on 5/6 October.

Nigel Hamilton
Bruce Robinson
Stephen Peover
Gerry McGinn
Andrew McCormick
Alan Shannon

Permanent Secretaries/Secretaries General Event

Nigel said Dermot McCarthy was keen to host a further event for Permanent Secretaries and Secretaries General in Dublin after the summer period.

SSC for Training and Development

Aideen McGinley said the first meeting of the Management Board for the NICS SSC for training and development would be held at midday.

Next Week's PSG

Medicines Management and Safety – DHSSPS.

DEBBIE SWEENEY
20 June 2006