

**DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING**  
**SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM MEETING**  
**Thursday 30 April 2009**  
**Board Room, Adelaide House**

**Present:** Dr. Aideen McGinley (Chair)  
Greg McConnell  
Trevor Connolly  
Patricia McAuley  
Fergus Devitt  
Richard Kenny  
June Ingram  
Kieran Mannion (Deputising for Nuala Kerr)  
John Baird  
Hugh McPoland  
Roger Arneill (Minutes)

**Apologies:** Catherine Bell  
Nuala Kerr  
Lucy Marten

**1. Introduction**

1.1 Dr. McGinley introduced the meeting and asked the Senior Management Team (SMT) to be aware that we are now in purdah due to the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament; this should be taken into account when providing advice to the Minister.

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Summary Action Sheet**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2009 were agreed on the basis of the following amendments:

Action should be amended on point 3.1.3 from Mr. Connolly to Mr. Kenny.

Action should be amended on point 3.1.5 from Mr. Connolly to Mr. Devitt.

2.2 The Summary Action Sheet was agreed.

**Action: Roger Arneill to amend minutes as per agreement in 2.1**

**Action: Roger Arneill to circulate past board minutes, forthcoming board agenda and subsequent board minutes**

### **3. Policy**

#### **3.1 Employee Volunteering and Development - Business in the Community, NI Cares Programme**

3.1.1 Dr. McGinley and Mr. McPoland formally declared an interest in this item. Dr. McGinley asked Mr. McConnell to chair the item. Mr. McConnell invited Mr. McPoland to introduce the paper.

3.1.2 Mr. McPoland highlighted the key points of the paper and sought agreement from the SMT to continue with the delivery of the NI Cares Programme but with a greater focus on individual participation, a reduced number of team challenges and a focus on work that aligns with Departmental objectives.

3.1.3 There was also some discussion about how the Department manages individuals leave to participate in these programmes.

3.1.4 It was noted that participation on volunteering opportunities would only be granted in cases where the opportunity was approved by the Department.

3.1.5 The paper was agreed subject to the focus on DEL priorities.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services Division to implement revised policy as agreed.**

## **3.2 Apprenticeships in DEL**

- 3.2.1 Mr. McPoland sought agreement, to the introduction of a DEL Apprenticeship Scheme. Mrs McAuley supported this and highlighted that Preparation for Work Division are working with other Public Sector organisations to promote work placements for Steps to Work participants. This needed to be taken forward by Corporate Services with PDG and CPG.
- 3.2.2 Dr. McGinley stated that she would be supportive and suggested that it could be a model for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) as a whole. Dr. McGinley also suggested that this could be considered at graduate level as well as the proposed administrative level.
- 3.2.3 Mr. Baird highlighted that there were precedents to this scheme under Jobskills which was discontinued under Training for Success. This could be used as a model for any future programme.
- 3.2.4 Mrs. McAuley highlighted the need for careful consideration on 'Mentoring and Support', including resource implications. It was also noted that the qualifications offered as part of the proposed apprenticeship scheme were already available to current AAs.
- 3.2.5 The SMT agreed to the recommendation.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to begin consultations with the relevant organisations as set out in the paper.**

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to raise work placements for Steps to Work participants with PDG.**

**Action: Dr. McGinley to raise this proposal at Permanent Secretaries Group and seek approval for further discussion at Personnel Director's Group regarding an extension to NICS**

## **3.3 NI Direct and DEL Website Management Proposal**

- 3.3.1 Mr. McPoland introduced the paper which highlighted the key changes which will take place during the transition to NI Direct. The paper also

addressed the concerns previously raised at SMT about resource implications for the Department in moving to this new system.

- 3.3.2 Mr. McPoland stated that the key impact would be on the Media and Marketing team as the information currently provided by each division is unlikely to change. However, Media and Marketing will be expected to co-ordinate DEL's input to the NI Direct website. It was agreed that the staffing issue would be addressed through the usual channels.
- 3.3.3 A discussion ensued regarding the differing purposes of individual department's websites and the NI Direct site.
- 3.3.4 There was agreement that the SMT needed more information to fully understand the implications of NI Direct. Mr. McPoland agreed to organise a presentation to SMT on NI Direct.
- 3.3.5 As an additional point, Mr. Connolly stated that he was unhappy with the speed of internet access in the Department. Mr. McPoland agreed to raise this with IT Assist.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to arrange a presentation on NI Direct to the next SMT meeting.**

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to speak to IT Assist about the speed of internet access in the Department.**

#### **4. Finance Report**

##### **4.1 Risk Register**

- 4.1.1 Mr. Connolly referred the SMT to the Risk Register included in the papers and asked the responsible Director to update the meeting on each item.
- 4.1.2 The relevant Grade 5 gave an update on each item and these were discussed by the SMT.
- 4.1.3 Through discussion of HR Connect and the service provided to DEL staff, several concerns were raised. It was agreed that an issues log should be created for this which would assist in highlighting and communicating the problems staff were experiencing.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to establish an issues log and a forum for divisional representatives to highlight problems regarding HR Connect. Progress to be reported to the next SMT meeting in May.**

## **4.2 Issues Log**

- 4.2.1 Three of the issues included were addressed through discussion of the Risk Register, therefore, further discussion was not required at this juncture.
- 4.2.2 It was agreed that the items regarding HR Connect and Information Governance should be removed from the risk register and remain on the issues log.
- 4.2.3 With regard to the 'Absence Target' issue, Mr. McPoland distributed a minute from Central Personnel Group which shows that DEL has exceeded it's target absence level for 2008/09.
- 4.2.4 Dr. McGinley and Mr. McConnell congratulated all directors on their division's performance with regard to absence levels.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to remove HR Connect and Information Governance items from Risk Register. These should remain on the Issues Log.**

**Action: Dr. McGinley will communicate congratulations to staff on exceeding this target when figures are validated.**

## **4.3 2008/09 End Year Accounts**

- 4.3.1 Mr. Connolly informed the meeting that work was ongoing on finalising the 2008/09 End Year Accounts. The Department is aiming to complete final sign off before the summer recess deadline of 3 July.

## **4.4 Draft Departmental Balanced Scorecard 2009/10**

- 4.4.1 Directors had some suggested amendments to the Departmental Balanced Scorecard.

- 4.4.2 Mr. Connolly said he would like to conclude the process and therefore would appreciate if suggested amendments were put to him quickly.
- 4.4.3 The Departmental Balanced Scorecard was agreed subject to the suggested revisions.

**Action: Directors to communicate suggested amendments to Mr. Connolly by close of play on Friday 1 May.**

#### **4.5 Final Quarter, Departmental Balanced Scorecard 2008/09**

- 4.5.1 Achievement against each target was reviewed by the SMT and where targets were amber or red, the relevant Director gave an update.
- 4.5.2 It was agreed that these achievements should be communicated to DEL staff.

**Action: Mr. Connolly to provide an article for Update Magazine on targets met, this will be extracted from the annual report.**

#### **4.6 Prompt Payment Statistics**

- 4.6.1 Mr. Connolly introduced this paper highlighting that prompt payment was a substantive issue from an Executive viewpoint as it is seen as a key support to the economy during the economic downturn. Mr. Connolly also noted that DEL was performing well in this area.
- 4.6.2 It was also noted that some invoices are coming directly to the Department rather than through Account NI and we need to process these invoices quickly.

**Action: Directors to relay the importance of prompt payment to branches.**

#### **4.7 Impact of Recent UK Budget**

- 4.7.1 Mr. Connolly highlighted the key figures for the NI administration as detailed in the paper.
- 4.7.2 A discussion on the likely outcomes for the NI administration followed.

4.7.3 Mr. Connolly highlighted that forthcoming budget bids would need to be robust as resources are likely to be tight.

## **5. Corporate Services Report**

### **5.1 Absenteeism Update**

5.1.1 This item was covered as part of the issues log. See item 4.2 of this minute.

### **5.2 Vacancy Position as at 26/04/09**

5.2.1 Mr. McPoland drew attention to the paper which highlights the vacancy position within the Department as at 26/04/09. The meeting reviewed the paper, no further discussion was required.

### **5.3 April Update**

5.3.1 Mr. McPoland introduced this paper which was noted by the SMT.

5.3.2 Mr. McConnell raised the issue of staff non-attendance at training courses stating that he was concerned at the number of cases where no explanation was offered for non-attendance. Mr. McConnell referred to a report which gave statistics on this and requested that this is presented to SMT.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to bring report on non-attendance at training courses to the May SMT meeting.**

### **5.4 Media and Marketing Calendar of Events**

5.4.1 This paper was noted without further discussion.

### **5.5 March Media Analysis**

5.5.1 Various members of SMT commented on the high level of positive media coverage the Department has received.

### **5.6 ICT Update**

- 5.6.1 Mrs. McAuley highlighted that Client Management System (CMS) was not a Preparation for Work Database as noted in this paper; it is DEL's Client Management System.
- 5.6.2 Mr. McPoland stated that the SMT needs clarity on the prioritisation of the project to make the CMS System fit for purpose. Mr. McConnell agreed to raise this at the next ICT Project Board Meeting and report back to SMT.
- 5.6.3 Dr. McGinley raised the issue of measurement of customer satisfaction. Mr. McPoland agreed to raise this with Lynne Taylor.
- 5.6.4 Mr. McPoland also highlighted that there was a need to establish a management strategy for the DEL kiosks in Jobs and Benefits Offices / Job Centres as the Fujitsu contract has now ended. Mr. McPoland and Mrs. McAuley are continuing with preliminary discussions on this.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to speak to Lynne Taylor about a scoping exercise to determine how customer satisfaction is measured across the Department.**

## **5.7 Central Management Branch Update**

- 5.7.1 On response times to Minister's cases, it was agreed that DEL is meeting its targets to a satisfactory level.
- 5.7.2 Mr. Devitt asked for an update on the proposed plans to change the sequential process of handling Assembly Questions (AQs) in the Department. Mr. McConnell anticipated a trial run in the near future.
- 5.7.4 Mrs. McAuley raised the point that the Assembly Business Unit were intending to conduct an exercise to identify the amount of officials time spent on responding to AQs. The current proposal was for officials to review time spent in responding to the previous twenty AQs. Mrs. McAuley suggested it would be more accurate to carry out this task on the next twenty AQs as the retrospective arrangement was likely to produce inaccurate figures. Mr. McPoland agreed to address this.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services to discuss the nature of the exercise intended to analyse the amount of time spent on AQs with the Head of Central Management Branch.**

**6. Any Other Business**

**6.1 DEL's Marketing Strategy**

6.1.1 Mr. McPoland briefed the SMT on a recent meeting he had held with the shared services centre regarding a new strategy for marketing DEL products and highlighted that there was an opportunity to enhance the marketing of DEL services. A DVD and promotional material which the Welsh Assembly is currently using to promote their education and skills products was viewed. It was agreed that the Director of Corporate Services should continue to progress the proposal.

**6.2 Swine Flu Virus**

6.2.1 Dr. McGinley raised the issue of a Swine Flu Pandemic.

6.2.2 Mr. McPoland confirmed that DEL had not been asked to change current procedures in any way, however, some Job Centres had requested additional cleaning materials.

Dr. McGinley concluded the meeting by stating that Mr. McPoland will be leaving the Department on 08/05/2009, wished him well in his new post and thanked him for his contribution to the Department.