

TITLE/ORGANISATION	Minutes – Departmental Board Meeting
VENUE:	Castleview Suite, Pavilion
DATE/TIME:	30 June 2021 @ 10:00
List of Attendees:	Conor Murphy, Finance Minister Eoin Rooney (SPAD) Colum Boyle Claire Archbold Stewart Barnes Joanne Dowling Paul Duffy Sharon Smyth Mark McLaughlin David Marshall Bill Pauley Ian Snowden Michelle Woods John Smyth (NEBM) Liz Ensor (NEBM) Anne McCusker (Boardroom Apprentice) Roger Walker (Minutes)
Apologies:	Siobhan Carey Jill Minne David Patterson Tom Taylor (NEBM)
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:	
<p>1. <u>Minister Murphy Welcome</u></p> <p>CB welcomed the Minister to the meeting and thanked him for his guidance and leadership, with particular reference to the challenging circumstances arising from the pandemic. The Minister agreed that it had been a remarkable year, and thanked the Board for the huge efforts made by them and their staff to make the Department’s achievements possible. He expressed that he was keen for the new Business Plan to be as ambitious as possible, and his hope that the Assembly Elections in 2022 would make a multi – year budget possible. The Minister thanked CB for his leadership following the departure of Sue Gray.</p> <p>CB informed the Board that this was Boardroom Apprentice Anne McCusker’s last Departmental Board Meeting, and the Minister presented her with flowers, wine and a card in recognition of the occasion. AMcC thanked the Board for the apprenticeship experience, and in particular her Boardroom Buddies Bill Pauley and Mark McLaughlin for their support over the last year.</p> <p>The Minister and ER left the meeting.</p>	

2. Welcome/Apologies

CB welcomed members to the meeting, noting apologies from Siobhan Carey and David Patterson (David Marshall deputising), Jill Minne (Michele Woods deputising) and Tom Taylor.

No conflicts of interest were registered.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting / Actions

Members confirmed they were content with the minutes.

On matters arising, all actions were complete. BP noted in relation to the action from the May meeting, regarding the DoF Response to Climate Change and Green Growth Strategy, that the inaugural meeting of the Project Board would hopefully take place in August. He added that he was considering how this strategy relates to adjacent schemes such as for biodiversity. CB noted that he would favour a rationalisation approach which would reduce the number of meetings.

LE asked about the follow up on action which was closed at the May meeting relating to the analysis of Board Minutes, and SB confirmed that the Departmental Board Operating Framework would be revised accordingly.

Action: SB to arrange for revision of Departmental Board Operating Framework to reflect decision to publish one set of Board minutes.

CB noted that the expectation for commissioning requests going forward will be for the members to either respond quantitatively or file nil returns, where appropriate.

4. Draft DoF Business Plan 2021 / 22

CB introduced the Draft Business Plan by explaining that he wanted to have the plan finalised by the Board so that it would be ready to go to the Minister and then Committee prior to recess in the next few days. As a result, any actions or revisions agreed at the meeting would need to be carried out within 24 hours. He clarified that he had to rationalise content as there was insufficient space to include all the Department's achievements. JS reported that he thought the plan was focused, and asked how performance would be monitored. CB confirmed that the Corporate Scorecard approach would be used, and that this tool allows DoF to be open and transparent about what it's trying to achieve. He added that he wants the plan to be ambitious and accepted that all targets may not be met when such an approach is taken.

SB referred to the 'Our Purpose' section and the difficulty in capturing the breadth of a wide – ranging department, and SS proposed that the section be updated to reflect commitments which had recently been agreed, which was accepted.

Action: SS to provide updated wording for Business Plan within 24 hours to reflect new commitments.

BP queried why the Programme for Government (PfG) and New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) had not been mentioned, and CB replied that the intention was for them to be referred to in the 'Foreword' and 'Introduction' sections. After discussion it was agreed that BP will provide a paragraph covering PfG and NDNA.

Action: BP to provide a paragraph for Business Plan within 24 hours to cover PfG and NDNA.

DM acknowledged the short and succinct style of the plan and agreed to revise the NISRA – related content to follow this approach.

Action: DM to revise NISRA – related content in Business Plan within 24 hours to follow short and succinct approach.

SB proposed to reissue the word version of the plan so that the members would have the opportunity to revise the content in tracked changes format.

Action: Members to propose revisions to the Business Plan in tracked changes format within 24 hours.

LE queried the workforce planning content, and CB explained that this was a reflection of the current transition period in terms of the Department's plans for workforce planning, but that efforts to optimise key priorities such as talent management and succession planning were progressing.

The Board agreed the Draft Business Plan 2021 / 22 subject to the inclusion of the agreed amendments.

5. DoF Corporate Risk Register 2021 / 22

SB introduced the Risk Register, which had been revised to focus on key strategic risks, and updated the Group on the 3 new risks, related to staffing, CGTP, and UKG replacement programmes. The board discussed the risks, focusing on risk descriptions and ownership, and BP queried why the Business Plan had 17 priorities yet the Risk Register featured only 11 risks. CB clarified that some risks cover more than 1 priority, and that whilst there didn't need to be an exact correlation between priorities and risks, it was important that priorities and risks should be tied together. It was agreed that a half – day risk workshop should be organised for late August / early September to agree the Risk Register. CB proposed that DfC be contacted with a view to exploring whether their reporting arrangements for risk would be useful to DoF.

Action: SB to arrange for a risk workshop to be held late August / September 2021, and to contact DfC regarding their arrangements for reporting risk.

6. ICO Audit Report

MMcL reported on the audit, which was in the area of Freedom of Information (FOI). It covered 'the extent to which the information handling practices of the DoF, within the scope of the agreed audit, conform with the codes of practices under sections

45 and 46 of the FOIA'. He confirmed that the level of assurance was found to be high, and that there was only limited scope for improvements in existing arrangements. MMcL reported on work to date to address the recommendations identified in the report, and outlined actions still to be taken over the rest of the calendar year. The Board endorsed these actions, and MMcL agreed to further update them on progress before the end of September 2021.

Action: MMcL to provide an update on the progress of actions taken to address the recommendations identified in the ICO Audit Report before the end of September 2021.

SB confirmed that IMU will address their related recommendations and report to the Board separately at a later date.

7. Asymptomatic Testing – Public Sector Leadership

CB reported on Robin Swann MLA's note to colleagues of 21 June 2021, which called on Ministers to consider the introduction of regular asymptomatic testing in their own departments. The Board actively considered this proposal and the options available for the delivery of asymptomatic testing to Civil Servants, and noted that the issue would also be discussed at the Stocktake Meeting scheduled for 5 July 2021, at which Derek Kennedy would be present to report on the New Ways of Working Programme's perspective.

8. Functioning of Government Act

MMcL gave an update on the application of the Functioning of Government Act (FoG) and its application from a Departmental perspective. BP agreed that it reflected good practice. IS identified the lobbying issue as being tricky and required careful consideration.

9. Finance Committee enquiry into the Fiscal Council and Commission

BP introduced this paper, which summarises the work carried out to date in the Finance Committee's enquiry into the Fiscal Council. He reported on the initial stakeholder engagement, the work programme, the Terms of Reference and related legislation. He confirmed that consultation with stakeholders had led to an understanding that there needed to be greater transparency on the subject of finance, and an introductory guide to NI Public Finances is to be produced as a result. BP noted that stakeholders had raised few issues with the Terms of Reference, and that future legislation would provide a secure footing for the Council.

JS asked whether the Executive would be advised to take the advice of the Council, and BP clarified that would not be the case. CB noted the paper, and acknowledged that there would be a requirement for the Fiscal Council to be appropriately staffed and resourced in due course.

10. Brexit Update

BP noted that the grace period for the NI Protocol was due to end on the day of the meeting, and CA advised that the outcome of the Judicial Review of the NI Protocol had just been disclosed and that it had been confirmed to be legal.

11. Finance Update

SB introduced the Finance Update, and explained that the detail given in the report was already out of date following the outcome of the June monitoring bids. He gave a breakdown on the resource position, both ring-fenced and non – ring-fenced, and described the non – ring-fenced position as at about level. He advised that £2m in capital was available as the CGTP won't need it, and asked the Board to consider whether they have plans for capital projects in 2021 / 22.

Action: Board to advise SB if they have plans for capital projects in 2021 / 22.

The Board discussed the format of the Finance Update, and the members had no proposals for modification. CB noted that in time the update will transition to a dashboard format.

12. HR Update

JD reported on recruitment competitions and workforce planning, and advised that the first meeting of the Workforce Senior Stakeholders Group had taken place, which had initiated a resource planning exercise to inform the next phase of the NICS recruitment plan for 2021-22, and for which a commissioning note from Jill Minne had been sent to Stakeholders Group members on 18 June for response by 16 July.

CB requested more detail on vacancies in future HR Updates to enable an informed decision on prioritisation of vacancy management.

Action: JD to provide more details on vacancies in her future HR Updates.

JD reported that the take-up by staff of annual leave was still proportionately low. MW asked about the financial impact at year end 2020 / 21, and SB will update the Board with the figure.

Action: SB to update the Board with the details of the financial impact at year end 2020 / 21 of proportionately low take-up of annual leave by staff.

JD gave an update on performance management figures, noting that DoF had not met targets and was also sitting behind the equivalent figures for the overall NICS. CB referred to the DoF figure for PPAs, asking why the Department was sitting at a completion rate of only 37% as at the start of June. CB pointed to failings in the performance management system, and emphasised the importance of the End of Year Review and PPA as opportunities to show staff that they and their work are valued. He described these performance management tools as being about respect, and stated that he doesn't want DoF staff to feel they are less valued than their colleagues in other departments. He asked the Board to encourage their line managers to make progress on completion of End of Year Reviews / PPAs.

Action: Board to encourage their line managers to complete End of Year Reviews and PPAs.

CB noted that work is ongoing to streamline the HR Update into a dashboard format.

13. Communications Update

MMcL noted that a staff event was scheduled for Tuesday 6 July, and that the next DoF Update would issue at the start of the month.

14. AOB

CB noted that the management of partial retirement in the Department was due for review.

He also reported on the Resourcing Sub – Committee of the Departmental Board, which had been inaugurated to build capability and strengthen the Department, and thus directly tackle the resource risk. He outlined the membership, including JMcB as Chair and SB as Vice – Chair, noted the fact that he was not a member was to ensure its independence, and confirmed that the Sub – Committee’s first report would soon be issued.

15. Papers to Note

CB noted the DARC Update, and confirmed that DARC had convened on 29 June.

16. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 8 September 2021.

ACTION POINTS/OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE/TARGET DATE:

- Action 1 – SB to arrange for revision of Departmental Board Operating Framework. To be completed by 15 October 2021.
- Action 2 – SS to provide wording for Business Plan within 24 hours to reflect new commitments.
- Action 3 – BP to provide a paragraph for Business Plan within 24 hours to cover PfG and NDNA.
- Action 4 – DM to revise NISRA – related content in Business Plan within 24 hours to follow short and succinct approach.

- Action 5 – Members to propose revisions to the Business Plan in tracked changes format within 24 hours.
- Action 6 – SB to arrange for a risk workshop to be held late August / September 2021, and to contact DfC regarding their arrangements for reporting risk. To be completed by 31 August 2021.
- Action 7 – MMcL to provide an update on the progress of actions taken to address the recommendations identified in the ICO Audit Report before the end of September 2021. To be completed by 30 September 2021.
- Action 8 – Board to advise SB if they have plans for capital projects in 2021 / 22. To be completed by 23 July 2021.
- Action 9 – JD to provide more details on vacancies in her future HR Updates. To be completed by 8 September 2021.
- Action 10 – SB to update the Board with the details of the financial impact at year end 2020 / 21 of proportionately low take-up of annual leave by staff. To be completed by 23 July 2021.
- Action 11 – Board to encourage their line managers to complete End of Year Reviews and PPAs.

Minutes written by:

Roger Walker

Date:

7 July 2021