

SUMMARY OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2007

Attendees:- Mr Tom Frawley, Ombudsman
 Mr Gerry McBride, Director of Investigation
 Mrs Michaela McAleer, Director of Investigation
 Mrs Sarah Lamont, Director of Investigation

Minutes:- Mrs Jacqueline Palmer

Apologies:- Mr John MacQuarrie, Deputy Ombudsman
 Mrs Anne Scott, Finance Officer

	AGENDA ITEMS	OUTCOME
1	Minutes - Meeting on 10 October 2007	
i	Matters Arising:-	There were no matters arising. Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting of 10 October 2007.
2	Update on Action Points from previous meetings	<p>Knowledge Management</p> <p>Mr McBride said the matter was being progressed. He said in January he will be asking staff to prepare a series of information notes that will be the core building blocks of the knowledge management system. He said it is intended this information will be populated into documents by end of February.</p> <p>It was agreed a briefing would be given to staff in late January/early February to detail the background and structure of the new system. Mr Frawley said when the system was finalised the Office would establish an Editorial Board to ensure the system is dynamic.</p>

Competencies

Mr Frawley met recently with DFP. There has been no progress by DFP to date in reviewing competencies that could inform a new Appraisal Framework

Re-design of Front Office

The meeting was informed the project would be completed by March 2008.

Principles of Good Administrative Practice

Mr McBride explained he is awaiting contact from OFMDFM.

Review of Office

Mr Frawley explained he had asked OFMDFM to initiate the consultation on the Review of the Office. It was agreed that Mr Frawley, Mr MacQuarrie and Mr McBride would develop a paper that would represent the position of the Office in relation to the consultation process.

Risk Register

The meeting agreed to examine whether consideration needs to be given to whether non accreditation of the computer system should be classed as a Risk.

Role and Purpose of the Office

Mr Frawley said there had been over 12 presentations provided to a range of organisations on the role of the Office.

Travel Arrangements/Bookings

Mr Frawley explained that the representative of NIAO had indicated there were no outstanding issues regarding the use of credit cards by the Office, however there had to be a separation of responsibility in the use of the card and authorisation. Mrs Scott will meet with Mr Frawley to discuss this matter.

Car Parking

Mr Frawley explained there was a possible change of ownership of the car park. Mr Rainey is addressing the possibility of reducing the number of parking spaces currently being funded by the Office.

Revised Induction Policy

Mr Frawley said Mrs Lamont will be taking this issue forward.

Revised Policy on Leave/Working from Home

Mr Frawley explained that Mr Houston had done some work on this issue prior to leaving the Office. This work would now be taken forward under the leadership of Mrs Lamont.

Interim Management Structure

Mr Frawley informed the meeting that the Office would operate on an interim management structure until Mr MacQuarrie's replacement was in post.

		<p>Telephone System</p> <p>Mr Frawley reported that Mr Rainey and Mrs Scott were taking this project forward with the objective of having the new system in place by the end of the current financial year.</p> <p>Draft Internal Auditor Report.</p> <p>The meeting was updated on the progress of Internal Audit.</p>
3	Directorate Meetings	<p>Health</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said that she had met with all her staff to complete their In Year Reviews, as part of the process she had initiated a Personal Performance Agreement for each member of her team that reflected the findings of the Internal Audit Report, the Indicators in the Business Plan and the Competency Framework. She said however it had been difficult to translate the performance indicators in the Business Plan into smart objectives/targets for staff.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said timescales were important and it might be helpful if he met with each Directorate to explain the position regarding direction of travel for the Office.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said that Mr Rainey had set up new reports in CHAS which are available for staff to enable them to track the cases against the 52 week target, so they can see very clearly when someone is coming up to a target and appropriate action can be taken.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said there was nothing exceptional to report regarding caseload. She said the Consultation on Review of Complaints was ongoing, the next meeting is scheduled for 15th January. In the meantime a sub group has been established to look at how Trusts are going to strengthen local resolution as part of the first stage of the complaints procedure.</p>

Planning

Mrs Lamont said she has had a number of meetings with her team and has now decided the team should meet at three weeks intervals.

She said there is no backlog of old cases but the team had a number of new cases allocated.

Mrs Lamont also informed the meeting she had met with the Admin team and one major issue identified related to complainants phoning regarding planning cases seeking information on the Ombudsman's initial powers to investigate. Mrs Lamont asked her team to identify a possible solution. She had received three different proposals which all had potential so it was agreed these would all be offered to Admin who would decide which solution they felt would be most useful to them in responding to complainants.

Mr McBride mentioned that Mr MacQuarrie had been passed two documents which had been produced by the Welsh Ombudsman's Office and these may be useful for the Planning Team.

Mrs Lamont said she had attended a meeting in Dublin re Accreditation of Training for Investigating Officers. The BIOA HR Sub Group had asked for input from BIOA organisations in Ireland. She said the meeting had also been attended by representatives of Police/Garda/Pensions Offices who all had very different requirements. She said across the Offices it was felt there wasn't any demand for an accredited scheme particularly as each organisation is so different and very few offer a framework for an internal career structure. It is also very expensive. She said the Dublin Ombudsman's Office offer a number of in-house training opportunities and they have undertaken to ensure that other Offices are made more aware of these development opportunities. Although this would not provide staff with accredited training, it would be more relevant than many external courses that were currently available.

Mrs McAleer mentioned that CIPFA were running an Accredited Training course which incorporated various modules which she felt might be useful and was being held over 12 days covering areas such as investigations, writing skills sets etc. Mr Frawley said he believed a member of staff should undertake this training. Mrs McAleer volunteered to attend the course and offer an evaluation of the course. It was agreed that this should also be offered to IO's to see if

another member of staff would be interested in attending and providing a different perspective on the course.

Mrs Lamont said at the meeting in Dublin a suggestion was made that BIOA should produce a set of competencies for Investigation Officers which would enable Offices to go out to training providers and request specific training for our staff and importantly allow us to specify the standard of training we require.

Mrs McAleer agreed to develop a paper on competencies/training.

Housing

Mr McBride said he currently had weekly meetings with his staff to review progress and as part of the In Year Review they had set targets for the remainder of the year and effectively any files that were on the books at 1 September 2007, 75% of these should be cleared by end of March 2008. 75% of all cases must be cleared within 6 months and 95% of all cases within a year. He said indicative targets for completion of all cases had been established which meant that there was now a running total of which cases had and had not been completed. He said the weekly report he receives at the meetings indicates progress was being made, this is highlighted in bold on Reports and it allows more focus and discussion at the meetings.

Mr Frawley suggested that Directorates should share their models for managing performance with each other.

Mrs Lamont said that IO's should have the same 'Purpose and Aim' on their job description. Mr Frawley said this should be agreed by the Directors and 'discretion and autonomy' should not be facilitated when drawing up job descriptions. He said there must be benchmarks that everyone had to comply with.

4 i	Finance <u>Financial Management Report</u>	<p>Mr Frawley said the Office was projecting an underspending for its financial outturn in March 2008. He asked Mr McBride to circulate the Review of the Office documentation to Directors because there are a number of very good comparators with Scotland, Wales and the Local Government Commission in England and our Office in terms of budgets and the number of cases received and investigated.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer suggested we should up date figures as the original Report referred to 2003 and figures could have changed significantly since that time.</p>
ii	<u>Departmental Resource Accounts 07/08</u>	<p>Mr Frawley said Mrs Scott has delivered on the faster closing in the previous two years. He said it was a major achievement for her and this year would represent another major challenge.</p>
iii	<u>PAC Reports</u>	<p>Mr Frawley said it was important that staff were made aware of these reports as everyone must have ownership of the learning contained in the Reports. He briefed the SMT meeting on the contents of some of the reports and said there was an onus on us to ensure that we were satisfied that the flaws, oversights etc identified “couldn’t happen here”.</p>
iv	<u>Draft Report from the Internal Auditors</u>	<p>Mr Frawley said it was important that Directors include the Draft Audit Report on the Agenda for their Directorate meetings.</p> <p>Item 4.1 – Communication with complainant Mrs McAleer said she had put this on the tasks list for her team which will appear every six weeks. She said she had also included this for bodies complained of as she felt it was also important that they should be informed about this matter.</p> <p>Item 4.2 – File Documentation Mr Frawley said that this was included as a reminder but was also an important area for ongoing attention.</p>

Mrs McAleer said that staff were of the view that the Office was preparing to go paperless and there appeared to be some confusion around this.

Mr McBride said there were issues surrounding all documents being scanned as they would have to be indexed and referenced in CHAS. He said this was a monumental task and could prove difficult to achieve.

Mr Frawley said that this issue goes back to Knowledge Management Project and guidance advising you that while we can not record everything, a record of what has been done must be on CHAS. Mr Rainey is to be informed of this re CHAS responsibilities.

Item 4.3 – Monitoring the Progress of Investigations

Mr Frawley said that this will be addressed with a framework of targets and benchmarks.

Item 4.4 – Complaints on the Handling of Investigations

Mr Frawley said this is an important issue, within the Deputy Commissioner’s responsibility.

Item 4.5 – Requests for information under the FOI Act

Mr Frawley said this was being formalised.

Item 4.6 – Records Management

Mr Frawley said it was important that the issue of protecting documents is addressed and this is to be included as a specific item. IO’s are to be asked what potential risks they consider may be relevant. Mr Rainey is to be approached regarding the protection of documents and all staff are to be reminded of their specific responsibilities.

		<p>Item 4.7 – File Referencing</p> <p>Mr Frawley said that the Directorates should be taken through this.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said that she felt it was unrealistic that every page could be individually referenced. Mr Frawley asked Mrs McAleer to raise her concerns with Mr Rainey.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Business Plan</p>	<p>Mr Frawley said that a lot of work had been done but the level of ownership still required to be enhanced.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said that the training needs should be a product of the Appraisal System which should be developed out of the Business Plan. Mr McBride said the Office should undertake a training needs analysis but he appreciated that this could be expensive however he believed it would provide an important starting point.</p> <p>Mrs Lamont said if BIOA agreed a set of competencies, these could be linked more easily to the Business Plan.</p> <p>Item 1.1 – Annual Report</p> <p>Mr Frawley asked Directors what they thought of the Annual Report structure and content – is it accessible to the public/citizens? How could we make it more relevant, more accessible? He asked Directors to discuss these issues with staff.</p> <p>Item 5.3 – Review current MOU’s and SLA’s</p> <p>Mrs McAleer asked that a QIA be drawn up in the New Year. Mrs McAleer to take this forward.</p>

		<p>Item 1.2 – Provide Info to Customers about Services</p> <p>Mrs McAleer asked if it would be appropriate for IO’s to give presentations. Mr Frawley agreed to this but said it was only if staff were willing to do so – it was not a requirement and training and preparation should be offered. He said it was also important that an agreed standardised presentation should be developed.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Customer Satisfaction Survey</p>	<p>Mr Frawley said that this was designed by our Office and he is content to revise it where there is a consensus on how the survey should be developed. He said he was aware some staff had concerns and he requested the views of the Directors about how the Office should proceed.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said she had looked at this with her team and she had concerns around some of the statements used regarding satisfaction levels. She was also concerned that the wording could be misconstrued and give a different interpretation to the complainant than the office intended. She said she had tried to link these statements to the Business Plan and had struggled with this, she felt this should be addressed to ensure our performance indicators are aligned with the Business Plan and the content of our survey.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said that the questions may require to be redrafted. Mrs Lamont suggested using NISRA to assist in this task. Mr Frawley agreed that we should now seek assistance to redefine the questions to ensure that the survey relates to the Business Plan. Mrs Lamont said that she felt the survey was rather repetitive in some areas.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said he wants amendments/changes done in such a way that it engages Admin and the Investigating Officers, again with the objective of making the ownership of the approach as inclusive as possible.</p> <p>Mr McBride said that there were sequencing issues to be taken into account when relating to the Business Plan to ensure targets are taken into account. He suggested we run the current survey to the end of the current Business year and then link the new survey to the new Business Plan which would also provide an opportunity to include Investigating Officers.</p>

		<p>Mr Frawley asked what the Team believed was the best option for taking this forward.</p> <p>Mrs Lamont said it takes time to get a questionnaire drawn up so we should make an initial approach to NISRA in advance of March as by mid March we should have a clearer indication as to what the Business Plan will look like.</p> <p>Mr McBride said that the redrafted survey would effectively be live from June 2008 so this would give six months to get a redrafted survey finalised.</p>
7	<p>New Business</p> <p>i. Internal Audit – Investigation of Complaints & Managing Information</p> <p>ii. Review of Investigation Process Health & Social Care Complaints</p>	<p>Discussed earlier in the meeting.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer produced a paper on the Review of Investigation Process. She said it deals with the issue of how we categorise and investigate Health & Social Care complaints.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said this is a model that we would adopt and implement from the 1st April 2008. Mrs McAleer has suggested that we take legal advice on some of the issues as it presently was work in progress and only for SMT to consider in draft form.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer gave a brief overview of the document and how their recommendations were reached.</p> <p>Mr Frawley suggested that a date be set for the middle of January for SMT members to go back to Mrs McAleer with any comments and then it can be progressed for legal comment and implemented.</p>

	<p>iii. Draft Communications – Well Written Style Guidelines</p>	<p>Mrs McAleer produced a draft paper for consideration regarding Written Style Guidelines to address the inconsistency in the layout of letters and reports which are issued under Mr Frawley’s signature.</p> <p>Two key areas which were included in developing the Draft were Disability Regulations and Consistency.</p> <p>Mr Frawley said that we needed to secure an understanding as to how this should be done and also all staff should be included to agree an inclusive approach. He suggested that the Directors discuss these proposals with their Teams and then a further meeting could be held of the SMT to agree a way forward.</p> <p>Mr McBride said that within the new knowledge management system the structure of letters will be changing. - A date is to be set for SMT to discuss a draft for Corporate Structure of Correspondence (J Palmer).</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>i. European Network of Ombudsmen – Revised Draft Statement</p> <p>ii. Seminar on Complaints Handling in the Social Housing Sector</p>	<p>Mr Frawley said this was a piece of work done by Professor Diamandouros, European Ombudsman. He said it was a draft statement where he delineated the responsibility of the European Commission Ombudsman from National, Regional and Local Ombudsman.</p> <p>Mr McBride said the Seminar in Social Housing was being held on 11 January 2008. He said that 38 Housing Associations, Housing Rights Service, CAB, NIHE, Regulation and Advice groups would be attending. This would enable the Office he said to deliver messages regarding how the application of proper administrative standards and good complaints handling can achieve better service delivery. Mr McBride said the seminar is targeted at Board level staff rather than complaints handling staff.</p>

	<p>iii. Public Sector Ombudsman's Meeting – 26 October 2007</p>	<p>Mr McBride said it became apparent after the recent survey how easily the practices of complaints handling could become out of date and this seminar will help assist a more effective approach to management of Housing complaints.</p> <p>The papers relating to this had already been circulated to all the Directors. Mr Frawley gave a general overview of the meeting to SMT members.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Date of next Meeting</p>	<p>The next meeting will be held on 13 February 2008 at 10.00am</p>