

SUMMARY OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2008

Attendees:- **Mr Tom Frawley, Ombudsman**
 Mr Gerry McBride, Director of Investigation
 Mrs Michaela McAleer, Director of Investigation
 Mr John MacQuarrie, Deputy Ombudsman

Minutes:- Mrs Jacqueline Palmer

Apologies:- **Mrs Sarah Lamont, Director of Investigation**
 Mrs Anne Scott, Finance Officer

| | AGENDA ITEMS | OUTCOME |
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| 1 | Minutes - Meeting on 12 December 2007 | |
| i | Matters Arising:- | There were no matters arising. Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting of 12 December 2007. |
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| 2 | Update on Action Points from previous meetings | <p>Knowledge Management</p> <p>Mr McBride informed SMT that he had received the software. This was being assessed to ensure it was fit for purpose. He anticipated that the Knowledge Management would be in place by late Spring.</p> <p>Mr MacQuarrie suggested Written Corporate Guidelines required to be drafted which should focus on the principles and information underpinning legislation in the first instance.</p> <p>Dr Frawley asked Mr McBride to arrange a meeting with Directors with the objective of developing an implementation plan.</p> |

Competencies

Mrs McAleer informed the meeting that she had met and discussed this issue with Mrs Lamont. They are still evaluating whether a new competency framework is required as there are only two competencies within the DFP framework which do not tie in with our IO's – Finance and HR.

Further discussions are to be held on this issue. Dr Frawley stated that it was important to ensure that the IO's agreed with the outcome and suggested asking if it would be possible to have alternative competencies ie. Analytical skills, Writing Skills in place of Finance and HR.

Mrs McAleer informed the meeting that Mrs Lamont was also addressing the possibility of giving 'theoretical answers' at promotion boards that would at least allow candidates from our Office to demonstrate they had a good understanding of the competencies and skills involved.

Re-design of Front Office

Dr Frawley said that work was progressing and was due for completion by end April 2008.

Principles of Good Administrative Practice

Dr Frawley informed the meeting there was still no contact from OFMDFM. Dr Frawley said when the Investigative Procedures have been agreed the Principles of Good Administration can be integrated into our documentation.

Review of Office

Mr McBride will begin preparations of a paper which would elaborate on the issues raised in the Review. The paper would be made available during the consultation process. This will be completed before the Review is launched.

Risk Register

Dr Frawley said responsibility for this issue had been assumed by Mr MacQuarrie supported by Anne Scott.

Role and Purpose of the Office

Dr Frawley said this examination is ongoing as part of the development of the Business Plan for 2008–2009 and would be finalised before publication of the Plan.

Travel Arrangements/Bookings

Mr MacQuarrie said that Anne Scott was dealing with the issues regarding the travel arrangements.

Car Parking

Dr Frawley said he had discussed this issue with Mr MacQuarrie and Mr Rainey. The current agreement was coming to an end. He said the possibility of reducing the number of parking spaces was being addressed. Mr Rainey to examine other potential providers of parking and related costs involved.

Revised Induction Policy/Revised Policy on Leave/Working from Home

Dr Frawley indicated that these policies are still being considered.

Interim Management Structure

Dr Frawley informed the meeting that a Trawl notice had been issued throughout the NICS for Mr MacQuarrie's replacement.

Telephone System

Dr Frawley said this issue on ongoing. Mr Rainey is dealing with it and conclusions and a way forward would be finalised by June.

Draft Internal Auditors Report

Dr Frawley in reviewing the Report with Directors said its conclusions represented an outstanding achievement by Mrs Scott.

Financial Management

In the absence of Mrs Scott, Mr Frawley provided an update on the Financial performance of the Office.

Dr Frawley reminded Directors to share PAC papers with their teams.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

Dr Frawley said this would run to the end of March, it had been agreed that the Office would then review how the process had operated over the previous twelve months. He reminded the Meeting that following discussions in the Health Directorate that the survey questionnaire would be redesigned possibly with the expert advice of NISRA. He also reminded the meeting that we should not treat comments on returned survey questionnaires as another avenue for 'comebacks' by complainants.

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| | | <p>Dr Frawley suggested Mrs McAleer, Mrs Lamont take forward the re-design of a new model for the questionnaire and asked that Miss Mills also be included in this project.</p> <p>Draft Communication/Well Written Guidelines</p> <p>A meeting has been arranged for the 21st February to bring forward proposals on how the Office could progress these matters.</p> <p>Housing Seminar</p> <p>Dr Frawley congratulated Mr McBride on the success of the Housing Seminar in January. He said it had been a major achievement and suggested another Seminar be held later in the year, possibly focussed on another sector.</p> |
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| 3 | Directorate Meetings | <p>Mrs Lamont had submitted a paper to Dr Frawley on discussions at her Directorate and he shared the content with the Meeting.</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Mrs Lamont has been looking with her Directorate colleagues at the Business Plan and the Balance Score Card and how this will be rolled out. She indicated further discussions were planned for the 15th February.</p> <p>Mrs Lamont confirmed there are no Planning Cases over a year old.</p> |

Admin

There had been no meeting since December due to leave and work commitments which had necessitated postponement of the meeting which had been rescheduled. A Team Meeting has now been arranged with Admin for the 15th February.

HR Connect

Mr Rainey submitted a paper to the meeting. It stated the HR Connect is intended primarily to operate as an on-line system, the benefit to staff and line managers being the ease of access to records both for information and updating as well as access to up-to-date policies and procedures through the electronic Staff Handbook. The meeting however was reminded we are not currently connected to the Public Service Network (PSN). This will be a stand alone system and it is hoped it will be installed within 2-3 months. Training will be provided as necessary.

Health Team

Mrs McAleer stated she had met with her team on Monday 11th February. She said she had also asked her team to think creatively on how the new Health Team may work and they are beginning to consider initiatives in preparation for the changes that lay ahead.

Housing Team

Mr McBride said he had met with his team and they all had sight of the Draft Audit Report. In relation to their caseload the number of older cases had reduced significantly. He said he had discussed the Corporate Written Guidelines and had also given them an overview of the Knowledge Management System and the timescales for its implementation.

Mr MacQuarrie said in relation to the Corporate Written Guidelines there were issues to be addressed regarding the use of legislative language. He asked "Are the letters too elaborate?". Whilst they require to be clear in explanation they also have to take account of the legislation.

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| | | Mr McBride said their discussions had been very positive and any outstanding issues would be addressed at their next meeting on 21 st February. |
| 4 | Business Plan | <p>Mr McBride informed the meeting that he had circulated the three key questions to all staff requesting feedback. Depending on the responses consideration will be given as to whether the Business Plan can be taken forward in the new format.</p> <p>Mrs McAleer said she felt there was a need to explain the methodology that informed the balanced scorecard to staff.</p> <p>Mr McBride said the Business Plan will be completed by early April. Mr Frawley reminded SMT to consider the Strategic Agenda going forward. He said once the Business Plan is up and running then consideration needs to be given to reviewing the Corporate Plan.</p> |
| 5 | New Business | <p>Annual Report Format</p> <p>Dr Frawley gave a brief overview of other Ombudsman’s annual report. He asked SMT to look at the various reports to identify areas which may assist us in improving the current format of Annual Report that might make it more accessible to our Stakeholders.</p> <p>Guidance on Complaints Handling/Investigative Procedures</p> <p>Mr MacQuarrie said the Internal Auditors had made a number of recommendations in their report and he had also taken into account responses to the Customer Satisfaction Survey. He said the main issues which had been identified were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Issuing of Data Protection leaflets; (ii) Clarity on moving from stage 3 to stage 4 of complaints – explanation required on why a complaint is moving to stage 4. |

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| | | <p>Mr MacQuarrie said the rest of the recommendations involved minor changes to the Guidance.</p> <p>Mr MacQuarrie and Mr McBride agreed to discuss further.</p> <p>Dr Frawley gave his agreement in principle subject to limited further discussion between Mr MacQuarrie and Directors before finalising the revised Guidance. Upon completion a note will be issued to all staff detailing the new Guidance.</p> |
| 6. | <p>AOB</p> <p>i. Knowledge Management</p> <p>ii. Report on Social Housing Seminar</p> <p>iii. Core Competence Framework</p> <p>iv. Absence Statistics October-December</p> | <p>(Previously discussed).</p> <p>Mr McBride said the attendance was good and he had received positive feedback to the Seminar. A number of bodies have indicated their intention to review their complaints process in light of the content of the Seminar.</p> <p>(Previously discussed).</p> <p>Dr Frawley said our sick absence rate was currently satisfactory at a level of 1.2% for the period just ended.</p> <p>Mr MacQuarrie is to discuss with Mrs Lamont the presentation of the figures.</p> |
| 7. | Date of next Meeting | The next meeting is scheduled for 9.00am on Wednesday 9 th April 2008. |