

**Labour Relations Agency
Notes of a Senior Management Team Meeting
held on Monday, 1st February 2010 in Room 2, Gordon Street**

Present: William Patterson
Gerry O'Neill
David McGrath

In Attendance: Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)

Minute	Action
1. Apologies	
Apologies were received from Penny Holloway.	
2. Minutes of Meetings held on 26 October 2009	
It was agreed that any comments Directors have on the minutes of 26 October should be forwarded to the secretariat as soon as possible. Subject to this the minutes were agreed.	DirS/Secretariat
It was agreed that the CEO/Directors should revise the structure of the agenda.	SMT
3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes	
No matters were arising that were not included in the agenda.	SMT
4. Board Meetings – November/December 2009 & January 2010	
It was noted that the SMT reviewed the minute of 26 October. It was agreed that any fundamental issues arising had either been addressed at the Board in December 2009/January 2010 or were included in the agenda today. It was further noted that, in the absence of the CEO in December, the SMT had provided a formal brief to the Board on matters arising.	
Following on from the January 2010 Board meeting it was noted that:	
➤ The CEO will be revising the Corporate Plan;	CEO
➤ The SMT are to meet on Friday, 5 th February to discuss the Corporate/Business Plans;	SMT
➤ The CEO will issue the Business Plan to Directors to review section objectives for the coming Friday;	SMT
➤ The revised Corporate/Business Plans are to be issued to the Board on 16 th February.	CEO

It was noted that fundamental to IiP was the involvement of staff in the preparation of the Corporate Plan. It was agreed that the CEO will brief staff on the Corporate Plan, Accommodation and the appointment

of new Board members on Thursday, 11th February. Two sessions are to be organised and staff advised.

**CEO
Secretariat**

It was noted that the next Board meeting will be held in the Regional Office.

➤ ***Agency Conference/Public Lecture***

It was noted that as the proposed Agency Conference, public lecture and Board away day were all scheduled to take place in October the CEO will speak to the Chairman with a view to rationalising the dates.

CEO

It was noted that it is proposed to hold an Agency conference in Autumn 2010/Spring 2011. The Chairman, Brenda Maitland, Peter Williamson & Trevor Morrow have agreed to sit on the Conference Sub-Committee. The PR Steering Group and Secretariat will also be involved in arrangements for the conference. It was agreed that the CEO will raise the subject at the PR meeting on 3rd February and ask the Group to look at organising a hotel, branding and PR for the conference. Arrangements for the Conference will be incorporated into the Business Plan.

Conf Sub-Cttee

CEO

The TOR, as indicated at the Board meeting, is that the Conference Sub-Committee will determine speakers for the Conference.

Conf Sub-Cttee

It was agreed that the DCS check the duration of the contract with Future Image.

DCS

➤ ***External Conferences***

It was noted that the CEO will be attending the TUC Conference in September, along with Sally McKee, Board Member.

It was agreed that Directors will forward staff nominations to the secretariat in relation to the CIPD (UK), CIPD (Ireland) and the TUC.

Dir

Some discussion took place around attendance at conferences. Directors expressed the view that the Agency should be represented at CBI as it was important to have an even representation at major conferences in all sectors.

It was agreed that the DCS attend CBI this year.

The DAS expressed an interest in attending an IOD conference; further details are to be discussed when available.

5. Corporate Services Report

➤ ***Accommodation***

It was noted that approval had been received to proceed with Unit 1. A business case was now required for refurbishment of the HQ complex including the conference rooms. It was noted that the deadline for

submission of the structural plans had been Friday, 29th January; the DAS is to contact Jenny McDonald with regard to changes made, in his absence, to the layout for advisory services.

DCS/DAS

The DCS agreed to speak to Jenny regarding feedback from the recent staff survey on accommodation.

DCS

➤ ***Furniture***

It was noted that a business case was required for the purchase of furniture for the conference rooms. This would be purchased through the UK equivalent of Central Procurement; cost circa £40K. A decision was required this week; however it was agreed to look again at tablet arm seating.

DCS

➤ ***Kitchen***

Following discussion it was agreed to look at refurbishing the kitchen once the main construction work was complete. It was noted that there were no health and safety issues with the current kitchen.

SMT

➤ ***Finance***

It was noted that there may be an underspend of funds for the 2009/10 financial year. The SMT is to look as a matter of priority at commitment of funds and areas for possible spend.

SMT

➤ ***IS/IT***

It was noted that progress was being made on disaster recovery. The DCS proposed employing PWC to update the IS Strategy.

DCS

On the health and safety front the DCS is to check the requirement for replacement of lights in the Agency.

DCS

It was agreed to initiate projects which could generate commitment and spend by the year end.

DCS

➤ ***HR***

See note attached as Appendix 1 – Staffing Changes (since October 2009).

It was agreed that the DCS and DAS meet to discuss transfer of staff within sections.

DCS/DAS

Discussion took place around filling the AA vacancy in the Agency through an advertisement to existing recruitment agency staff. It was agreed that the DCS raise the issue with the TUS Secretary. It was also agreed to check the equal opportunity balance of AO applicants and temporary staff.

DCS

With respect to Corporate Services items for formal SMT meetings it was agreed that only items of exception would be raised at the formal SMT meeting; all other items having been covered through the bi-

monthly report at the Board meeting.

6. Risk Register

It was noted that the SMT must collectively review the risk register in advance of the March Audit Committee meeting.

SMT

7. Agency Corporate 10/13 and Business Plan 10/11

See note in 4. above.

➤ *Management Charter*

It was noted that the CEO will be providing a further draft to Directors for comment.

CEO

➤ *Research*

See attached minute from meeting held on 1 December 2009 (Appendix 2).

The DAS undertook to forward New Economics Foundation (NEF) information to the CEO and Directors.

DAS

8. 2009 DEL Review of Agency

It was noted that KPMG had held further meetings with the SMT and are to meet with the Chairman on 2nd February. The CEO awaited their first draft report.

9. IS/IT Strategy

➤ *IS Strategy – Security Accreditation and Disaster Planning*

A detailed update on progress will be included in the February Board papers.

DCS

➤ *Case Management developments*

In November, LRA officers attended a structured review of the way ahead for this application which was chaired by BT. BT will produce a formal report following information to be provided by the officers on aspects of system requirement.

10. Operations

➤ *Customer Complaints*

It was noted that there were no customer complaints ongoing.

➤ *Restructuring of SMT meetings*

Further consideration is to be given to the restructuring of meetings – see note 5 above.

SMT

➤ ***PRONI – disposal of files***

It was noted that internal audit may raise the issue of records management in their report. It was noted that the Finance Officer was currently rationalising the filing system in Finance with a view to removing appropriate files to an external storage site.

It was agreed that:

- ✚ the Records Management Procedure required updating;
- ✚ the Agency required a more strategic approach to managing information;
- ✚ the Agency should move towards a corporate filing system;
- ✚ the Personnel Officer, Office Manager and Secretariat should all be consulted on the above.

DCS

A project leader will be required if this matter is to be progressed effectively. Alternatively, this may be a candidate for a joint working party approach.

11. Accommodation

➤ ***HQ***

See above (para 5 refers).

➤ ***Regional Office***

It was noted that there was a suggestion to replace conference furniture in the Regional Office.

➤ ***Unit 1***

See above (para 5 refers).

12 JNCC

➤ ***Progress on Policies and Procedures***

➤ ***Progress on Secretary meetings***

It was noted that:

- there were a number of issues outstanding due to the fact that no JNCC had been held since September
- and due to pressure of work there had been no meetings between the secretaries since December.

A number of key issues outstanding included Absence and Health & Safety Policies, both of which had been with TUS for some time.

DCS

Following discussion it was agreed to establish a Health & Safety Sub-Committee of the JNCC.

SMT

➤ ***TUS Vacancy Correspondence***

After some discussion it was agreed that the Agency regularly operated in general alignment with the principles set out in TUS correspondence; however it was agreed to discuss the matter further at

JNCC.

SMT

➤ ***Development Planning***

It was agreed that the CEO report the MS position on accommodation at the JNCC and await suggestions from TUS of other potential joint working topics. Some topics that might be appropriate were suggested ie PRONI, IS/IT; continuity planning for disaster recovery; PR joint working group; website and risk management.

SMT

➤ ***Equal Pay***

It was noted that correspondence had been received from Brian Campfield NIPSA regarding the NICS/NIPSA equal pay settlement for NICS staff at EOII AO & AA grades. After some discussion it was agreed that NIPSA would have to indicate whether or not there was an equal pay issue within the Agency which was comparable to that in the NICS before the SMT would consider the details of the agreement. The SMT awaits further clarification at the meeting to be arranged with Brian Campfield.

SMT

➤ ***Accommodation Review***

It was noted that the DCS had received correspondence from TUS re the above; this will be discussed at the pending JNCC.

13. Continuous Improvement

➤ ***Continuous Improvement Action Plan***

➤ ***iP Assessment Methodology***

It was noted that the Action Plan agreed by the Board in April 2009 was being progressed. It was agreed to discuss Customer Service Excellence and iP at the SMT meeting on Friday and decide which one would be the best next step for the Agency.

SMT

➤ ***Staff Conference***

➤ ***Diversity Training***

It was agreed to consider holding a Staff Conference on 26th March; secretariat to email staff and research venues.

Secretariat

Possible topics included Dignity at Work, Diversity, Research or Customer Service Excellence. Following some discussion it was agreed that the DCS will arrange for a representative from CEF to brief the SMT on CSE to allow them to consider this collectively.

DCS

➤ ***Staff Survey***

➤ ***Staff Risk Assessment***

It was noted that the above issues are still to be addressed.

DCS

14. SMT Team Development

➤ ***SMT Training Procurement Exercise***

It was noted that the CEO will contact Joan Hart, PA Consulting to

arrange a further meeting with the SMT as and when appropriate. **CEO**

15. Any Other Business

➤ *Meetings with DEL/DFP re Arms Lengths Bodies*

It was noted that the Chairman, CEO, DCS and Peter Williamson as Chair of the Audit Committee, will be meeting with representatives from DEL/DFP to discuss a review of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). **CEO**

➤ *Correspondence*

It was noted that the DCA had received correspondence requesting Agency involvement in a facilitation exercise with NIPSA/LGSC. CEO to discuss with the DCA/DAS. **CEO/DCA/DAS**

➤ *RPA Appeals Procedure*

It was agreed to discuss this request at the next SMT meeting. **SMT**

➤ *RPA Education Sector*

It was noted that whilst the consultation period for the above Staff Transfer Scheme closed on 15th January the CEO would review the documents with a view to submitting an Agency response. **CEO**

➤ *Board/Staff Christmas Meeting*

Following the success of the recent Board/Staff meeting it was agreed to look at possible venues for 2010; the joint meeting to coincide with the December Board meeting. **Secretariat**

➤ *IDS Bulletins*

It was agreed to set up a project team within the Agency to examine the viability of subscribing to the Expert HR publication. It was noted that ACAS already subscribed. As this was primarily an operational tool, the DCS and DCA would look at the availability of two officers from their sections to progress the evaluation. **DCS**

16. Date of Next Meeting

- Informal SMT 22nd February
- Formal SMT 1st March

To All Staff

The following staff changes have recently taken place.

ERM temporary vacancy:

Arising out of Elaine Clarke's maternity absence and following an internal trawl, Helen Smyth was appointed to a temporary ERM post in the Conciliation Section. She took up her new duties with effect from 7 December 2009.

Staff Officer permanent vacancy:

Following an external competition, Paul Cassidy was appointed to the post of Staff Officer (Finance and Administration). He commenced working with the Agency on 14 December 2009.

ERO permanent vacancy:

Following the retirement of Tom McComb in August 2009, Terry Dunlop has transferred from the position of Staff Officer (Finance and Administration) to ERO in the Advisory Section. He took up his new duties with effect from 11 January 2010.

ERO temporary vacancies:

Following an internal trawl, Patrick Quigley and Damian Rushe were appointed to temporary full time positions as EROs and Kathy Sloan to a temporary half time position as an ERO in the Conciliation Section. The ERO posts became temporarily vacant following the transfer of Suzanne Hamilton to the Compliance Officer post in Corporate Services, the temporary promotion of Helen to the ERM grade, and Sarah Kerrigan's absence on maternity leave. Patrick took up his new position on 2 November 2009, Kathy on 23 November 2009, and Damian on 7 December 2009.

EOII temporary vacancies:

Following an internal trawl, Stephen Coyle was re-confirmed in a temporary EOII post in the Advisory Section, Eugene McPolin was promoted to the temporary EOII post in the Conciliation Section arising from Patrick's temporary promotion, and Wendy Halligan was temporarily promoted to the part time EOII vacancy in Corporate Services arising from Kathy's temporary promotion. Eugene took up his new position on 4 January 2010 and Wendy on 11 January 2010.

Clerical Officer temporary vacancies:

Further to the temporary promotion of Eugene, Stephanie Girvan is now acting up from Clerical Assistant to Clerical Officer in the Conciliation Section on a full time basis. Nathalie Taylor continues to act up from Clerical Assistant to Clerical Officer in the Conciliation Section on a half time basis, and Joanne Turpin continues to act up from Clerical Assistant to Clerical Officer on a half time basis in Corporate Services.

Recruitment exercises to fill permanent EOII and Clerical Officer vacancies are currently in progress, so you can expect to receive further staffing announcements in due course.

Note of Research Meeting held Tuesday 1 December 2009

Present: Jim McCusker (Chairman)
Trevor Morrow (Board Member)
Jimmy Donaghey (QUB)
David McGrath (Director of Advisory Services)
Mary O'Brien (Employment Relations Manager)

Apologies: Bill Patterson

Ongoing research

(i) Joint LRA/LRC

The joint papers are available on the LRA website.

Action: check if the papers are on the LRC website
send link to Clare Moore at NIC-ICTU
contact Future Image re preparing a press release

(ii) QUB

Two of the contacts provided by the Agency have taken part in the research and have been very useful to talk to.

An initial paper is expected to be released in the Spring of 2010.

Proposed research

(i) Economic appraisal of Agency services

This is currently part of the DEL review of the Agency and is being carried out by Oxford Economics. To date this group has not contacted the Agency for any information.

Action: prepare a tender specification of carrying out an economic appraisal of the Helpline, pre-claim cases and conciliation cases

(ii) Mediation

Karen Tarr is currently looking at mediation training provided by different groups and its accreditation.

Action: check when Karen's work will be completed

(iii) Outcome of tribunal cases

Discussion took place around issues raised by the Equality Commission's response to the DEL consultation on Dispute Resolution, in particular

"...a perception that the ACAS Individual Conciliation service was committed to promoting a settlement at all costs, irrespective of the validity of the claims;"

(ECNI, 2009)

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It was agreed that it would be worth investigating customers' views of conciliation using a qualitative approach for representatives and a quantitative approach for employees.

Action: prepare tender specification

Any other business

Launch of Annual Report next year – consideration should be given to inviting a keynote speaker

Date of next meeting: Thursday 4 March 10.00 am