

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

Present: William Patterson
Penny Holloway
Gerry O'Neill
David McGrath

In Attendance: Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)

	Minute	Action
1. Apologies	There were no apologies.	
2. Minutes of Meeting held on 1 February 2010	The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2010 were agreed.	Secretariat
3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes	There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.	
4. Board Meeting – 24 February 2010	It was noted that the Board had agreed to visit the European Foundation in Dublin on 31 March 2010. Arrangements were being made for the visit; however it was agreed that there were a number of practical issues which the CEO will raise with the Chairman. Final arrangements will be advised to the Board & SMT in due course.	Secretariat CEO
	<p>➤ <i>Corporate Plan/Business Plan</i></p> <p>It was noted that both the Corporate and Business Plans had been approved by the Board and were now submitted to DEL for approval.</p> <p>The DCA expressed concern that the Corporate Plan included reference to a baseline figure of a '2% increase on previous year in pre-claim cases undertaken by the Agency, such an objective was not within the control of staff. The DCA didn't see how a baseline figure could be set given the current economic climate. The DCA felt it undermined her role as Director. The CEO indicated that there was no intention of including redundancies figures in a baseline and went on to say that if the Agency was going to promote pre-claims then there had to be some indicator of whether or not that promotional programme was effective. After further discussion the CEO indicated that there would be an opportunity for the Board to consider a revision of this objective in due course.</p>	CEO

➤ ***Accommodation***

It was noted that the Board had no significant comments on the Accommodation paper, apart from involvement of staff. The CEO had indicated that members of staff were involved in the accommodation programme.

➤ ***Staffing***

The CEO had advised the Board that there was currently only one full-time vacancy at AA level which was in process of being filled.

➤ ***Bi-Monthly Report***

It was noted that the CEO will look at the bi-monthly with a view to determining the best method of reporting progress on strategic objectives to the Board.

➤ ***DEL Review of Dispute Resolution***

It was noted that the Chief Executive had attended the DEL quarterly meeting on 23 February. The CEO reported that a draft paper would shortly go to the Minister, the Executive Committee and Assembly. In parallel to this it was expected that a revised draft Bill would be submitted to the Assembly, around May this year.

➤ ***DFP Review of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs)***

It was noted that interviews were complete. A report was expected.

➤ ***DEL Review of the Agency***

It was noted that DEL were awaiting the first draft report from KPMG which was expected by mid March, following which it would be issued to the Agency for comment.

➤ ***LRA Conference 2010***

It was noted that the Board had agreed to hold the Conference on either 21st or 23rd September 2010.

CEO

It was suggested that venue tendering may have to be carried out through COPE (Michael McMahon).

It was agreed to:

- ✚ check if plans were being made to hold conferences on a similar topic around the same time;
- ✚ check if the Labour Party Conference was being held that week, as many TU reps would attend this;
- ✚ ask Future Image for a checklist of tasks/issues to cover in planning the conference.

CEO

CEO

It had been agreed that the Conference Sub Committee will organise keynote speakers, themes etc while the Secretariat will look after planning for the Conference. It was noted that the Board had agreed the structure of the Conference (similar to previous years) with the possible theme being 'Employment Relations of the New Decade.'

CEO

5. Corporate Services Report

➤ *Budget*

It was noted that indications from DEL suggested that the Agency would be able to carry-over funds into the 2010/11 financial year.

DCS

The DCS will be preparing a detailed letter for the call-down of maximum funds this month.

DCS

6. Risk Register

The CEO reminded Directors of the need to review and update section Risk Registers in line with his email of 18 February. Any changes will be incorporated into a combined register for submission to the Audit Committee on 18th March (papers to be issued 8th March).

SMT

The DCS is to follow up progress of internal audit reports on HR and IT for inclusion in Audit Committee papers.

DCS

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*

It was noted that the next Research Committee meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 4th March.

It was suggested that, in light of the high volume of evaluation projects set out in the Research and Evaluation Business Scorecard paper, an evaluation programme should be drawn up for the year. It was agreed that the DCS attend part of the Research Committee meeting to discuss procurement issues which may arise.

CEO/DCS

The DCA queried the minute of the Research Cttee on 1 December 2009 which stated “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.” Some discussion took place during which the DCA reinforced her point that it was important that sections were kept informed about work being undertaken. The CEO indicated that he would clarify the above quote with the Research Committee and make clear to them the distinction between the normal evaluation process and research.

CEO

Discussion also took place around evaluation of the Agency as a whole ie Pam Meadows and NEF; it was agreed to forward information on both to the Committee with a view to organising a presentation by

CEO/Secretariat

NEF.

8. 2009 DEL Review of Agency

See note in 4. above.

9. IS/IT Strategy

➤ *IS Strategy - Security & Data Protection*

It was noted that:

- ✚ the DCS is awaiting project initiation documents from PWC; **DCS**
- ✚ the Agency is in the process of installing disaster recovery systems in the Regional Office; however the logistics of the process are still to be ironed out; **DCS**
- ✚ the DCS is awaiting a new contract from managed services. **DCS**

➤ *Case Management developments*

It was noted that:

- ✚ there is a need to get the case management system on track again which may mean using the services of a commercial group; **DCS**
- ✚ the DCA will look at chairing a group to take the ICMS system forward; the group would feed into a wider group including the DCS and Temp IS Manager. The DCA will discuss the matter at the IC team meeting on 3/3/10; **DCA**
- ✚ the DCS is to ask BT for a formal report following the meeting held on 24 November 2009. **DCS**

10. Operations

➤ *Customer Complaints*

It was noted that there were no customer complaints ongoing.

It was noted that internal audit had highlighted the maintenance of customer complaint files. The DCS had agreed that in future it will be the responsibility of the Compliance Officer to maintain the files. **DCS/Comp Off**

Audit had also indicated that the current Records Mgt Policy needed to be reviewed.

It was agreed that the Compliance Officer should also check the Agency website for complaints. **DCS/Compl Off**

➤ *SMT meetings*

It was agreed to give consideration to the role of SMT meetings, how they are conducted bearing in mind:

- ✚ the formal meetings need to be minuted;
- ✚ the meetings need to deal with the core policies of the Agency with respect to management and governance.

Directors are to give some thought to the above and forward comments/suggestions to the CEO.

SMT

➤ ***PRONI – disposal of Agency files***

It was noted that rationalisation of files was on-going; section files are reviewed annually. It was again noted that the policy required updating.

It was noted that the Compliance Officer, Temp IS Manager, General Office and Secretariat staff will be attending a record Mgt Seminar next week which will look at legislative requirements, FOI, disposal of files, etc.

11. Accommodation

➤ ***HQ***

See above (para 4 refers).

It was agreed that the DAS will respond asap to the DCS re choice of seminar chairs/writing tablets. The DCS is to ask Jenny McDonald to look at alternative ranges of chairs with side tablets.

DAS/DCS

Discussion took place around the NIPSA request for a joint working group to be set up to deal with accommodation. It was felt that accommodation was not an appropriate topic for a JWG, however it was agreed to communicate and consult widely with staff perhaps through an implementation group which would be representative of all sections. Representatives would consult with staff and ideas would be fed back to the SMT via Jenny.

➤ ***Regional Office***

It was agreed that the DCA will discuss furniture needs with the ERM in the Regional office and report back to the SMT.

DCA

➤ ***Unit 1***

It was agreed to remove this item from the agenda but to include it as part of the HQ heading.

Secretariat

12 JNCC

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

Dignity at Work – DCS awaits comments from Directors following which he will consult with TUS.

SMT

It was agreed that the DCS contact David Walsh with a view to organising Dignity at Work training for staff asap.

DCS

Absence – it was agreed that there was a need to take a more pro-active approach with regard to absence and examine the causes and patterns of absence within the Agency with a view to addressing these.

SMT

It was further agreed that the DCS will provide an up-to-date list of the current position with regard to HR policies and procedures. **DCS**

➤ *Progress on Secretary meetings*
It was noted that the secretaries are due to meet on Tuesday, 2nd March 2010. **DCS**

➤ *TUS Vacancy Correspondence*
It was agreed to remove this item from the agenda. **Secretariat**

➤ *TUS Dispute Resolution Comments*
It was agreed to remove this item from the agenda. **Secretariat**

➤ *Equal Pay*
It was noted that the CEO is in process of arranging a meeting with NIPSA in relation to the application of the NICS/NIPSA equal pay agreement. **CEO**

13. Continuous Improvement

➤ *Continuous Improvement Action Plan*
➤ *IiP Assessment Methodology*
It was noted that the CEO has organised an IiP meeting this Friday, 5th March 2010. **CEO**

It was noted that Corporate Services will be undertaking a pilot self assessment of the service it provides to Advisory & IC. It is hoped that this will give a better idea of what customer service excellence involves, the methodology and whether or not it is appropriate for the Agency as a whole to progress. **DCS**

It was agreed that a JWP with regard to working towards regaining IiP status. It was agreed to appoint an assessor to feed into the group with a view to having a ‘dummy’ assessment next September in preparation for IiP re-examination in 2011. The process would indicate how effectively the Agency was embracing IiP.

The Board will be advised of the above and that the Agency is reviewing the difficulties faced during the last 18 months with the option of applying for CSE whilst retaining IiP.

Following some discussion it was agreed to re-examine the production of an Agency Newsletter. **DCS**

➤ *Staff Conference*
It was agreed to look at a new date for the Staff Conference bearing in mind suggestions around Depression Awareness Week at the end of April. **SMT**

The Secretariat to email staff to release 26th March in their diaries.

Secretariat

➤ ***Diversity Training***

See note in 12 above.

Possible topic for Staff Conference.

DCS

14. SMT Team Development

➤ ***SMT Training Procurement Exercise***

It was noted that dates provided to Joan Hart, PA Consulting were unsuitable for her to meet with the SMT. The Secretariat is to contact Joan for a list of available dates in March and advise the SMT accordingly.

Secretariat

15. Any Other Business

➤ ***Professional, Legal and Investigative Practices***

Discussion took place concerning accreditation of operational staff at ERO grade and above. It was agreed that, following the completion of the current mediation training, the SMT will meet to discuss accreditation of staff. It was agreed that this could also be linked to liP.

CEO

➤ ***Administrative assistance in the Secretariat***

It was agreed that; due to the high volume of work anticipated in the Secretariat this year, an AA will be moved into the office to provide back-up assistance. This will necessitate the Director's secretary being moved elsewhere; Directors to discuss suitable options.

Dirs

➤ ***Primary Key Holders – LRA Gordon Street***

It was noted that 4 staff members should be named as primary key holders to the Gordon Street premises. Denis Beale, the DCS and CEO had agreed to be named key holders.

➤ ***Performance Appraisal review***

The DCS reported that annual performance appraisals would be due soon and he would appreciate feedback from Directors to his recent email regarding a review of the system. The changes suggested by the DCS would amalgamate training and appraisal and reduce evaluation. It was suggested that the best time for a review would be when the appraisals were being completed or shortly afterwards. The value of the forms was also questioned particularly for long-serving staff.

The DCS suggested encouraging staff to use training logs which feed into the training report which is produced monthly and could be stored in shared folders.

DCS

➤ ***Staff Risk Assessment***

It was agreed that the DCS submit a specification to CPD for a stress risk assessment to be carried out within the Agency.

DCS

➤ *Staffing*

It was agreed to use the reserve list created in the recent EOII recruitment exercise to fill vacancies created by internal promotions. It was noted that there was not a big enough pool of staff to internally advertise and the impact of such internal advertising on the Helpline could prove disastrous. It was also noted that an opportunity for an EOI internal promotion (temporary) would soon arise.

DCS

The SMT also discussed probation reporting of staff.

➤ *Confidentiality*

It was agreed that, in the light of recent issues raised in the media concerning confidentiality, there was a need to clarify and reinforce the standards required of staff particularly with regard to confidentiality. It was agreed that the CEO will raise the issue in a positive light within the next month. It was noted that confidentiality forms a part of the induction process which is continually reviewed.

CEO

16. Date of Next Meeting

- Informal SMT 29th March
- Formal SMT 1st April