

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY SECOND MEETING OF THE
LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 12.45 PM
ON FRIDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2009
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, 2-8 GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Jim McCusker (Chair)
Peter Williamson
Neal Willis
Trevor Morrow
Patricia O'Farrell
Lyn Fawcett

In Attendance: David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)
Alison Wolfe (Minutes Secretary)

1. Apologies

Action

Apologies were received from Bill Patterson who was ill and also from Brenda Maitland and Penny Holloway.

On the proposal of Trevor Morrow seconded by Patricia O'Farrell, it was agreed to send a basket of fruit, along with best wishes to the Chief Executive. It was agreed that this should be sent jointly from the Board and Staff.

2. Status and further progression of the Corporate Plan

It was agreed that, following a workshop facilitated by Mr Alan Shields (DFP, Development and Innovation Division), there would be a further workshop on the Corporate Plan immediately before the January meeting.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 19 November 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2009 were proposed by Lyn Fawcett, seconded by Trevor Morrow, and agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda

It was noted that the Chairman had written to Mr Alan Shannon inviting him to the February 2010 Board Meeting. Alan Shannon had replied indicating that he would like to hold initial introductory meetings with the Chairman, CEO and Staff before meeting with the Board later in the

Chairman

year.

5. Chairman's Business

5.1 Declaration of Board Member Interests

No interests were declared by members.

5.2 Board Vacancies – Update

The Chairman indicated that further queries had arisen with the recruitment process; however he was hopeful that 2 appointments would be made with effect from 1 January 2010. A new recruitment exercise would be required to fill the remaining vacancy.

Board members expressed their dissatisfaction with the delays in appointing new members and recommended that the process be reviewed following completion of the current recruitment exercise.

5.3 Joint LRA/LRC Board Meeting

It was noted that there was nothing further to report with regard to the joint meeting.

5.4 Annual Board Public Meeting

A list of possible speakers was agreed for next year's Public Meeting.

Chair

5.5 Joint LRA/Equality Commission Meeting

It was noted that because of the delay in the DEL Review of Dispute Resolution, there was nothing further to report on the joint meeting.

5.6 Board Training 2010

Training evaluation and feedback was provided by two board members (Trevor Morrow and Peter Williamson) in relation to "On Board" and "Good Governance".

5.7 Conference Attendances 2010

It was agreed to look at this again in January when new members have been appointed.

6. Chief Executive's Business

6.1 DEL Review of the Agency

It was noted that KPMG wished to hold a further meeting with the CEO on his return to the office. DEL had undertaken to let the Chairman and

CEO have sight of the draft report.

6.2 Continuous Improvement

It was noted that the Management Charter had been revised by the CEO.

The DCS is currently working on the evaluation of training methodology and indicated that the intention was to survey staff in the new year.

DCS

Progress continued on completing outstanding annual staff appraisals and mid-term appraisals.

DCS

6.3 RPA

It was noted that the Agency had confirmed its willingness to perform the role of independent appeals mechanism. The two remaining substantial areas of reform are education and governance.

6.4 Equal Pay Audit

It was noted that there was nothing current to report.

6.5 Review of Dispute Resolution in NI

The Chairman indicated that Departmental officials hoped to put proposals on the above to the Minister within the next week or two following which a decision will be made.

After some discussion it was agreed that if proposals were published well in advance of the next Board meeting the Chairman could draft a letter setting out some points which the Board may wish to respond to immediately.

6.6 Additional Paternity Leave & Pay

It was agreed to adopt the recommendation in paragraph 10 that the Agency take note of the consultation paper and agrees to provide information and advice on the new regulations to both employers and employees.

6.7 Board Year Plan 2010

The amended Board Year Plan 2010 was approved.

SMT

6.8 Monthly Management Report

DAS

PR

It was noted that a senior officer had recently provided 2 radio

interviews covering Christmas parties and problems which may arise.

It was also noted that the Agency will be taking an exhibition stand at the Holiday World event in January.

The Agency is also taking part in 'Promoting Effective Employment Relations in Schools'; a pilot scheme involving head teachers and union representatives in a bid to improve industrial relations in schools.

6.9 *Bi-monthly Management Report*

DAS

The Advisory services remained busy on all fronts although there was currently a seasonal downturn in calls to the Helpline. It was noted that the level of customer satisfaction (95%) with the Advisory services had been reported on via a Parliamentary Question at the Assembly.

DCS

Strategic Objectives

It was noted that the IT system was progressing well; a security manual was being prepared and the regional office was being designated as the site for the emergency recovery of IT systems.

Accommodation

Some delays had arisen with Unit 1 but these were being progressed.

Finance

It was reported that although there was still an underspend of funds, as expected, a number of projects would require additional funding from January onwards.

Absence

Absence figures had increased probably due to seasonal flu, and should settle down again in the near future.

Vacancies

It was noted that recruitment was progressing on all fronts with the new Finance Officer having commenced employment with the Agency on 14 December. A recruitment exercise for EO11 in the Helpline was currently underway. Temporary recruitments were also progressing.

DCA

Following a request it was agreed in future to also print the table of figures relating to the graph for Employment Jurisdictions – Cleared.

Secretariat

7. Research Committee

7.1 *Meeting held on 1 December 2009*

It was noted that the heading for agenda item 7.1 should read

‘1 December’.

It was noted that the Agency intended to further publicise the recent exercise commissioned jointly with the LRC.

The Agency was also examining the possibility of drawing up a specification for research on the economic impact of the Agency’s services.

A paper had been presented to the meeting on ‘Mediation Provision in the Public Services’. It was noted that some mediation had already been carried out in relation to the teaching profession and that this paper could be taken into account in future Board discussions regarding mediation.

Discussion had also taken place surrounding the outcome of tribunal cases following conciliation by the Agency. The Committee had agreed to draw up a tender to provide independent evidence of the impact of the Agency’s conciliation.

8. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board

8.1 *Letter from Jim Hanna, DEL dated 2 December 2009 re Remuneration of Labour Relations Agency Chairman and Board Members 2009*

The above letter was noted.

8.2 *Letter from David McGowan, OFMDFM dated 18 November 2009 re Review of the Default Retirement Age*

Following discussion it was agreed to consider the issues surrounding a default retirement age in January.

Secretariat

8.3 *Chief Executives’ Forum flier re Public Accountability for Members of Audit Committees Seminar, Wednesday, 10 February 2010*

Trevor Morrow expressed an interest in the above seminar but is unavailable on 10 February.

It was agreed that Board members advise the Board Secretary or Secretariat of their interest in attending courses/seminars and arrangements can be made for attendance.

DCS/Secretariat

8.4 *CIPFA Training Bulletin December 2009*

It was again agreed that Board members advise the Board Secretary or Secretariat of their interest in attending courses/seminars and arrangements can be made for attendance.

DCS/Secretariat

8.5 STI Television & Radio Interview Skills

It was agreed to check if Brenda Maitland would be interested in attending the above.

DCS/Secretariat

It was noted that Neal Willis has attended several courses relevant to Board/governance through his employment. It was agreed that, for the record, he advise the Secretariat of such courses which he has attended whilst on the Board.

Secretariat

8.6 Employment Bill – LRA Amendments

After some discussion on the content of a letter from June Ingram, dated 9 December 2009, it was agreed to discuss this matter again in January before responding. However, it was felt that the Board should state that due to the nature of the work of the Agency it was essential that consideration was given to appointing representatives with employment relations experience who could bring a balanced view to the Board.

Secretariat

The view was also expressed that once a full Board was in place it would be useful to address staff concerns regarding appointments to the Agency Board. It was suggested that this could be addressed through team meetings where staff could be advised that the difficulty was with the appointment process rather than in attracting applicants.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Public Relations

It was noted that the Advisory services have produced a seminar booklet for January-March 2010 which will be distributed in Business Eye and via a mail shot to approximately 9,000 clients.

An interview with the Chairman will be published in the January edition of Business Eye and will be followed by an interview with the DAS.

It was agreed that these public relations items were all very welcome.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board will be held on **Thursday, 28 January 2010**, beginning at 12.00 noon in Room 1, following a corporate planning workshop to be facilitated by Mr Alan Shields of Development and Innovation Division.