

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST MEETING OF  
THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 4.00 PM  
ON THURSDAY 31 JANUARY 2008  
IN THE CULLODEN HOTEL, CRAIGAVAD**

**Present:**  
Pat McCartan (Chairman)  
Patricia O'Farrell  
Peter Williamson  
Boyd Black  
Norma Heaton  
Roden Ward  
Jim McCusker  
Julie Anne Clarke  
Gordon Milligan  
Brenda Maitland

**In Attendance:**

William Patterson (Chief Executive)  
Penny Holloway (Director, Conciliation & Arbitration)  
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)  
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)  
Anne Gunning (Minutes Secretary)

**1. Apologies Action**

There were no apologies.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 20 December 2007**

**5.8 Monthly Management Report**

It was agreed that the third paragraph would be amended to read:

*"The Chairman reported that Derek Alcorn of the Citizens Advice Bureau had proposed a partnership with the Agency which would be mutually beneficial, for training and development etc."* **Secretariat**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 2007 were then proposed by Roden Ward, seconded by Peter Williamson, and agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to the above amendment.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda**

#### **5.1 LRA/LRC Joint Working Meeting – 26 October 2007**

The CEO reported that he had been in contact with the LRC regarding a working agenda for future joint meetings. No confirmation on the agenda had been received from the LRC.

#### **5.2 Research Project – Report on Meeting with Department – 28 November 2007**

It was noted that the Research Business Case had been completed and forwarded to the Department for approval, in accordance with the Financial Memorandum.

**CEO**

#### **5.3 Meeting with Equality Commission**

It was noted that the Equality Commission has reported back and agreed the joint working agenda.

**SMT**

#### **5.5 Management Statement/Financial Memorandum**

It was noted that a letter is expected from the Department regarding the status of the DEL LRA Management Statement and Financial Memorandum.

#### **5.6 LRA Business Case £4.5m**

It was noted that the Chairman had written to the Permanent Secretary expressing the Board's disappointment at the current budget and methods of funding. He expressed the hope that the Green Book Business Case, now submitted to the Department for discussion, would help DEL and the Agency jointly address the outstanding funding issues.

**CEO**

### **4. Chairman's Business**

The Chairman began by saying that he was pleased to see Evelyn Collins, CEO of the Equality Commission, awarded a CBE. He was delighted when colleagues were recognised for their contribution. It was agreed that congratulations are to be sent to Evelyn from the Agency Board.

**Chairman**

The Chairman referred to his recent meeting 28 January 2008 with the Minister, Sir Reg Empey. It had been a very cordial meeting. The Minister was very well informed on the Agency's £4.5m Business Case and also on the ongoing Gibbons consultations. The Minister anticipated that the

Dispute Resolution Pre-Consultation exercise would commence shortly. It was noted that the Chairman had discussed an LRA invitation to the DEL Assembly Committee to meet on Agency premises. It is anticipated that this would give an opportunity for Board Members to interact with the Committee. Following discussion it was agreed that a formal invitation is issued to the Committee through the appropriate channels.

**Chairman**

## **5. Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee Meeting – 16 January 2008**

It was noted that draft minutes of the meeting are with the Sub-Committee members for approval. The approved minutes are to be forwarded to Board Members. The Chairman indicated that during 2008 the Sub-Committee would be meeting on the basis of an agreed schedule which included 12 March; 11 June; 10 September and 10 December:

**Board  
Secretary**

## **6. Chief Executive's Business**

### **6.1 Dispute Resolution NI – Gibbons Report**

The CEO reported that he had been notified by the Department that the Pre-Consultation exercise is expected to be launched in the first week in February. The Steering Group is to be convened by DEL to clarify its role and function. It was noted that Lynne Taylor DEL Employment Legislation has been replaced by Tom Evans who will be meeting the CEO.

**CEO**

With regard to the outcome of the Agency stakeholder consultations, the CEO referred to his proposal to arrange a seminar in March to which the participating stakeholders would be invited. Professor Paul Teague has agreed to speak. A representative from ACAS would also speak. The CEO was in touch with DBERR for a speaker in respect of the current GB legislative changes.

**CEO**

It was agreed that members should meet for a half day in order to discuss and determine an Agency perspective on the key issues relating to the improvement of dispute resolution arrangements in Northern Ireland. This would inform the Agency's contribution to the Pre –Consultation exercise.

**Board  
Secretary**

### **6.2 LRA Business Case £4.5m**

The first draft report on the Green Book Business Case which had been forwarded to DEL was discussed. The Chairman acknowledged the considerable amount of work which had gone into the report. He was of the view that by fully meeting its statutory remit the Agency could make a significant and positive impact on economic growth and social cohesion.

It was agreed that generally the text of the Business Case, in parts, needed some clarification with elements of repetition eliminated. There may also be some calculations which need to be revised. It was agreed that the Report should highlight through an Executive Summary the strategic direction and intended outcomes of the Agency's work.

CEO

After discussion the following points were made:

**Pg 39 3.8** - Leads with Internal Development – better to start with External Development

**Pg 69 Table 7.1** - Figures may need amended.

**Pg 20 2.36 Second bullet point/4<sup>th</sup> bullet point** - Should these points be linked?

**Pg 26/27 Projects** - Project not explicitly mentioned. Possible additional bullet point?

**Pg 145 LRA Option 1 – Status Quo Table** - Discount Rate 3.5% - Was this the standard discount rate?

It was noted that the business case had been submitted to DEL for discussion. It was likely that the first meeting would be with the DEL economist. As matters progressed significant changes to the document would be issued to the Board for further discussion.

CEO

Board Members confirmed that the work on the Report by the SMT and Mike Parker was greatly appreciated.

### **6.3 Monthly Management Report**

#### ***Chief Executive***

Point 15. It was noted that the meeting with Roden Ward, Chair Audit Committee, on 25 January had been postponed.

The CEO referred to the significant amount of work which has been undertaken in relation to IiP. He had addressed meetings with staff at HQ and the Derry Office. The CEO reported considerable positive feedback from the meetings. Timetable suggestions from Eric Jenkinson had been taken into account. It is anticipated that the preparation process will end in May with the assessment for IiP taking place in June. Training for all staff has been arranged in preparation for the introduction of the new appraisal scheme. The management development and learning evaluation processes are also being taken forward. The CEO indicated that he is meeting on a weekly basis with the two members of staff responsible for IiP. To date progress is on target for a June assessment.

CEO

***Director – Corporate Services***

The DCS reported on the handling of a customer complaint and its heavy demands on management time.

It was noted that on Page 7 of the report the text should read **1.5** CO vacancies. Amendment noted.

**Secretariat**

***Director – Advisory Services***

The percentage of missing calls recorded for the Enquiry Point was discussed. It was suggested that the CEO consider the staffing of the Enquiry Point and that a report on the impact of the new telephone system should be brought to a future meeting. Board Members agreed that the lost call issue should be addressed through the securing and filling of temporary posts additional to establishment. Board Members felt that the present staffing of the Enquiry Point should be treated as a matter of urgency.

**CEO/DAS**

After further discussion, the Management Report was accepted.

**7. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board**

- 7.1** Letter dated 17 December 2007 from DEL to CEO re The Transfer of Undertakings and Service Provision Change (Protection of Employment) (Consequential Amendments etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 – SR 2007 No. 494
- 7.2** Letter dated 17 December 2007 from DEL to CEO re The Industrial Court (Proceedings) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2007 – SR 2007 No. 495

Details noted.

**8. Any Other Business**

**Public Relations**

- 8.1** Business Eye (Nov/Dec 2007) article on Helpline Enquiry Point
- 8.2** Belfast Newsletter (10 Jan 2008) article on “My First Job” featuring CEO

Noted.

**CBI Conference**

Gordon Milligan circulated a report on the CBI Conference which he had attended in November in London. He indicated that the conference had a very political theme. Whilst the conference was very interesting and provided a good networking opportunity to promote the Agency agenda he questioned the value of attendance and suggested that consideration should be given to attending this conference on alternate years.

**CEO**

The Chairman thanked Gordon for his report.

### **Chairman**

Boyd Black, on behalf of Board Members, offered warmest congratulations to the Chairman on his CBE Award in the New Year Honours List. He said that although it was a personal honour for the Chairman which was well deserved, it was felt that it reflected well on the Agency which had made great strides under his chairmanship. Boyd then presented a gift to the Chairman on behalf of Board Members on the occasion of his retirement from the post of Chairman. The CEO then presented gifts to the Chairman on behalf of the Agency and the SMT.

The Chairman thanked the Board and acknowledged their good wishes. He said that it had been a privilege to hold the post of Chairman of the Labour Relations Agency for the last six years. He expressed his gratitude for all their help and companionship. The Chairman also thanked the CEO and Directors for their support and said that he could not have done the job without it.

The Chairman wished the Board and the Agency every success in its future work.

The Board Meeting was followed by a dinner when Board Members were joined by invited guests from Labour Relations Commission in Dublin, ACAS, DEL and former Board Members who had served under Pat McCartan's Chairmanship.

### **9. Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday, 28 February 2008 at 10.00 am in the Agency's offices.

In the event that there would be no appointment to the Chair of the Labour Relations Agency by the next meeting on 28 February 2008, Board Members agreed that the meeting would be chaired by Vice-Chairman, Dr Boyd Black.