

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE  
LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 10.00 AM  
ON THURSDAY, 26 JUNE 2008  
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, 2-8 GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

**Present:** Jim McCusker (Chair)  
Boyd Black  
Julie Anne Clarke  
Norma Heaton  
Patricia O'Farrell  
Gordon Milligan  
Peter Williamson

**In Attendance:** William Patterson (Chief Executive)  
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)  
Anne Gunning (Minutes Secretary)

Prior to the start of the business meeting Tommy Wright, ERM, gave a presentation on the results of the Advisory Services User Survey.

Following the presentation, Tommy answered Board Members' questions on the results. It was agreed that it was good to see that a fair number of companies had made changes in their policies and procedures since attending Agency Workshops. However, it was felt that it would be useful to research the reasons why many small firms and new businesses did not appear to use Agency services. The Chairman thanked Tommy for his presentation.

**1. Apologies Action**

There were apologies from Roden Ward, Brenda Maitland, Penny Holloway and David McGrath.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 22 May 2008**

**8.4 Quarterly Performance Report**

It was agreed that the first sentence should be amended as follows: **Secretary**

*Following discussion it was agreed that the colour coding of the Quarterly Report should be reviewed in order to reflect the end of year report.*

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2008 were then proposed by Norma Heaton, seconded by Julie Anne Clarke, and agreed as a true and accurate record of the

meeting.

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

#### **3.1 Research**

It was noted that work is progressing on the proposed joint working agenda in co-operation with Kevin Foley, LRC.

**CEO/MOB**

#### **3.2 PR Services**

It was noted that the DCS will be progressing the tendering for PR services. The CEO will be considering the provision of political lobbying services.

**DCS/CEO**

#### **3.3 DEL Review of Dispute Resolution**

It was noted that the ACAS proposed Code of Practice on Discipline and Grievance Guidelines are now on the ACAS website.

#### **3.4 Attendance at Staff Conference**

It was noted that the CEO will be reviewing arrangements for optimum staff participation at future Staff Conferences.

**CEO**

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

#### **4.1 LRA Board Vacancies**

It was noted that there has been a large number of applications and it has been difficult to get an agreed date for shortlisting and interviews. The Chairman is still awaiting communication from the Department.

**Chairman**

#### **4.2 Chairman/CEO Stakeholder Meetings**

It was noted that the Chairman and CEO had meetings with the CEO of LRC, the President of OITFET, NIC ICTU, ACAS and the new CEO of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Discussions included the value of a Rights Commissioner for Northern Ireland and the future of dispute resolution in NI.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a joint meeting with the LRC to discuss the Republic of Ireland's Rights Commissioner model. It was agreed to invite representatives from LRC to meet Board Members on the afternoon of the Board Meeting on 25 September, or 16 October 2008.

**CEO**

It was also agreed that Eileen McBride, President of OITFET would be invited to a Board Meeting, possibly in November, to speak about

**Chairman**

the implications of the review of dispute resolution for Tribunals. The Chairman is to write to the President.

#### **4.3 14<sup>th</sup> National Labor-Management Conference, Washington**

The Chairman reported on the conference which he had recently attended, along with the CEO. He said that they had been very well received at the conference and had been given a tour of the FMCS offices in Washington. Both the Chairman and CEO agreed that while attendance at the conference had been useful, it was not necessary to attend on a regular basis.

#### **4.4 International Agencies Conference, Cape Town, South Africa – October 2008**

It was agreed that the CEO would attend the International Agencies Conference in Cape Town in October.

**CEO**

### **5. Audit Committee**

#### **5.1 Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 14 May 2008**

The minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 14 May 2008 were ratified by the Board.

#### **5.2 Audit Committee Meeting held on 18 June 2008**

In the absence of Roden Ward, who chaired the Audit Committee on 18 June, Julie Anne Clarke gave a report of the meeting.

- Internal Audit had raised the issue of increasing pressure on the Corporate Services Section. It was noted that this was discussed at the Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting.
- Appraisals – It was noted that the majority of performance appraisals are completed and there are no particular problems.
- Annual Report and Financial Statement Review - It was highlighted that the Annual Report was presented in a new format. The Sub-Committee having considered the Report agreed to recommend the Report to the Board for issue to the Assembly.
- Statement of Internal Control – it had been agreed to present this statement independently within the body of the report. The DCS confirmed that this has been done.
- Financial Statement – various items had been discussed and the statement agreed.
- External Audit – the external auditor had commended the Agency's good quality accounts and had praised the Agency staff for their work. The Board recorded its appreciation of the work carried out by staff in preparing the accounts.

**DCS**

It was noted that the Department had recently sent two representatives to the Agency's Audit Committee Meeting. It was agreed that, in accordance with good governance, it would be appropriate for the Department to have a reciprocal arrangement where a representative from the Agency Audit Committee could attend the DEL Audit Committee. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to DEL expressing the Board's desire for representation at the DEL Audit Committee Meeting.

**Chairman**

### **5.3 Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2007/08**

It was noted that the Finance & Personnel Committee had discussed the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2007/08 at its meeting on 19 June. The amendments which they suggested were agreed by Board Members. Following the report of the Audit Committee the Chairman recommended the Annual Report and Accounts 2007/08 for approval of the Board. The adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts 2007/08 was proposed by Boyd Black and seconded by Peter Williamson.

It was noted that the style of the Report had been changed this year as dictated by the Treasury. This had involved a considerable amount of work. It was noted that the style will be further reviewed next year.

**CEO/DCS**

## **6. Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee**

### **6.1 Minutes of the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee Meeting held on 19 March 2008**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March were ratified by the Board.

### **6.2 Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee**

The Chairman reported on the Finance & Personnel meeting held on 19 June. It was noted that the draft Annual Report and accounts 2007/08 had been discussed and amendments recommended to the full Board.

Eric Jenkinson had joined the meeting and gave an update on progress with IiP. He said that the standards for IiP are now more demanding. However, he felt that there had been a major change for the better in the organisation. There had been considerable improvement and progress made, although some intensive work was needed in order to meet the IiP standards by October.

The Committee had discussed equal pay and had looked at details of the distribution of staff pay scales by grade and gender. It had been agreed to recommend to the Board that an equal pay audit be carried

**DCS**

out. Board Members agreed with the Committee's suggestion. An independent organisation is to be appointed by tender.

The Committee had also discussed current vacancies and staffing in the Corporate Services Section. With regard to the JNCC it was noted that an action plan is presently being developed. The CEO's Appraisal was also discussed and there would be a further session after this Board Meeting.

Chairman

There was some discussion on IiP following the Chairman's report in respect of the change of culture in the organisation. It was noted that the Agency would be making its IiP submission in October 2008.

CEO

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

### **7.1 DEL Pre-Consultation Exercise – Improving Methods for Dealing with Workplace Disputes**

It was noted that the Chairman and CEO would be meeting with DEL in the afternoon. The Chairman is to raise the date of commencement of the Review of Dispute Resolution with the Department. It was noted that the Review Steering Group is to meet on 4 July. With regard to a question on the proposed timescale, it was anticipated that the formal consultation would be undertaken during Autumn 2008. Members expressed concern at the slow pace. This point is to be raised with DEL by the CEO.

CEO

### **7.2 IS/IT Business Position and Direction Paper**

It was noted that the CEO and DCS are meeting with Paul Atkinson of PWC on 28 July to discuss the first draft paper. It was noted that the paper raises the issue of shared corporate services.

CEO/DCS

DCS reported that there is a lot of work going on in regard to IS/IT at present. There will be an IS health check on Monday, 30 June which will contribute to the evaluation of the Agency's IS/IT position.

DCS

### **7.3 Staffing Policies and Procedures Action Plan**

It was noted that the JNCC MS Secretary had met with the TUS Secretary on 19 June. The DCS circulated a paper to members on proceedings of the meeting. This included details of outstanding policies and procedures currently subject to review. It had been agreed by the two secretaries that they would have monthly meetings. It was noted that following this meeting, there had been a meeting of the JNCC on Wednesday, 25 June. An action plan was agreed which will reflect progress and will be issued to staff. An additional (half day) JNCC is scheduled for 13 November 2008 to review progress and assess the impact of the work on employment relations in the Agency.

DCS

DCS

CEO/DCS

## **7.4 Monthly Management Report**

### *Chief Executive*

#### *IiP*

The CEO reported that he had meetings with Eric Jenkinson, the latest of these was on Wednesday, 25 June when revised action points were drawn up.

#### *Director (Advisory Services)*

It was noted that an unsigned query had been received by DFP from an unknown member of the public. This had been passed to the Agency through DEL. The person had asked why the Agency did not charge for its services. The CEO had discussed the query with the Chairman and had responded through DEL, to DFP.

The CEO also referred to a complaint against the Agency which had been discussed at a previous Board Meeting. The DCA had dealt with Stage 1 of the process and the CEO had dealt with Stage 2. It was noted that the complainant has now referred the complaint to the Ombudsman.

After discussion, the Management Report was accepted.

## **8. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board**

### **8.1 Letter from Department re Management Statement/Financial Memorandum**

It was noted that a letter had been received from the Department regarding the MS/FM which had been forwarded to them last month. The CEO had signed the new MS/FM but had indicated that members had agreed that this did not denote the Board's agreement. It was agreed that the Chairman would discuss the letter with representatives from the Department at a meeting which he and the CEO were having on Friday, 27 June.

**Chairman**

## **9. Any Other Business**

### **9.1 Letter from Branch 28**

It was noted that a letter had been received by Board Members from Branch 28. It was agreed that the Chairman and CEO would meet representatives from the Branch along with other Board Members.

**Chairman/CEO  
Secretariat**

It was also agreed to have a pre-meeting prior to meeting the Branch.

**Secretariat**

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Board will take place on **Thursday, 28 August 2008 at 10.00 am in the Agency's offices, Gordon Street.**