

**MINUTES OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND FORTY SEVENTH MEETING OF
THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT 10.30 AM
ON THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2009
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, 2-8 GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

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

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

1. Apologies

Action

Apologies were received from Brenda Maitland, Julie Anne Clarke and Penny Holloway.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 28 May 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2009 were proposed by Peter Williamson, seconded by Patricia O'Farrell, 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 Register of Interests

Board Members were reminded that statements of Board Member interests should be returned to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

4. Chairman's Business

4.1 Meeting with Minister 17 June 2009

The Chairman and CEO met with the DEL Minister on 17 June. The Chairman provided a comprehensive review of the LRA performance 2008/09. This was very well received. Regarding the submitted business cases to the Department for additional posts the Chairman was

pleased to report that he had received confirmation of approval of temporary appointments for one year, as follows:

- DP IT manager post.
- Two additional Helpline EO2 posts.
- One additional Staff Officer (statutory compliance) post.

CEO/DCS

It was agreed that this was excellent news. The CEO indicated that it was hoped to have these posts filled by mid-year.

The Chairman advised members that he felt the Minister was well disposed towards the Agency. They had discussed the Equal Pay situation in the Civil Service and the consultation process on the DEL Review of Dispute Resolution. In particular the extension of the statutory protection for Agency staff involved in resolving disputes was emphasised.

4.2 Letter dated 31 May 2009 from Sir Reg Empey, Minister for Employment & Learning

This item was deferred for discussion at 5.1.

4.3 Industrial Court and Certification Officer Appointments – Consultation with the Agency

The Chairman advised that the NI Employment Bill had its first reading in the Assembly on 22 June and the second will be on Tuesday, 30 June. The Assembly Committee and consideration stages will take place after the summer recess. Royal Assent will probably be received after this year. It was agreed that progress with the Bill will need to be monitored in order to check the implications for the LRA. It was agreed that a short briefing will be prepared for the Assembly Committee to be discussed at the next Board Meeting in August.

CEO/DAS

4.4 Board Vacancies

The Chairman reported that the first interviews had taken place. However, a problem had arisen causing a slight delay. The panel would be meeting again in late July.

Chairman

5. Chief Executive's Business

5.1 Review of Dispute Resolution in NI

The CEO reported that he had a full and frank discussion at a meeting with representatives from ACAS on 8 June on the economic appraisal of the Agency's services. ACAS indicated that they would consider giving assistance. It was decided that the Agency should look at their helpline in the first instance to see if similar exercises could be followed up by the DAS and the Advisory section in order to give a qualitative assessment of the Helpline and LRA services.

After discussion, it was agreed that the LRA Annual Report as currently formatted undersells the success of the LRA. It could be a strong PR tool for the Agency and it was agreed to consider this, particularly with regard to inclusion in executive summaries of the LRA Annual Report. CEO advised that he has had discussions with the Agency's PR Consultants who are in the process of developing a strategy for raising the public image of the organisation. This will be brought to the Board Meeting in August or September.

CEO

ADR Seminar 3 June 2009

It was noted that the seminar had been very well attended with a fairly good cross section of representatives. Following the seminar the CEO had issued a follow-up questionnaire to those who had attended and also to those who had expressed an interest but were unable to attend. Ten responses had been received to date. A list of seminar attendees is to be provided for the Board. It was agreed that a report on the responses to the questionnaire is to be submitted to the August Board Meeting.

CEO

It was decided not to hold a second seminar in August but it was agreed to give further consideration to a seminar at the turn of the year. It was agreed that if a second seminar is held, representation would need to be as widespread as possible.

Some concern was expressed about minor hitches at the venue. This was partly due to the large turnout, almost double the original estimate. It was noted that the PR Consultants are putting a check list in place for future occasions. It was agreed that technology could also be put to better use for future events.

CEO/DCS

The draft LRA Response to the consultation questions was discussed at length. It was agreed that two changes should be made.

CEO

- (1) Answer to Question 5 – the fifth sentence should be reworded to revise the role of the Inland Revenue GB.
- (2) Answer to Question 34 - this paragraph is to be clarified.

It was also agreed that the title could be reworded, i.e. – “*LRA Interim Position on a Response to the Consultation Questions*”.

It was further agreed that the updated interim response should be made available to those who attended the seminar, to those who had been contacted in relation to the seminar, to the Assembly Committee, and should also be posted on the Agency's website in order to reach as wide an audience as possible. It was further agreed that a podcast by the CEO could be put on the website highlighting headline issues regarding the Agency's proposals. The website could also provide links to other sites, e.g. DEL with their recent BDO and OCG research papers.

CEO

CEO

CEO

Following discussion it was agreed that a Board paper setting out a

CEO

framework for the establishment of an Employment Commissioner Scheme should be submitted to the August Board meeting. The paper is to include an initial assessment on costs and benefits.

CEO

5.2 Continuous Improvement

It was agreed that the CEO would prepare a paper for the September Board meeting setting out the agenda for the further introduction of the Balanced Score Card. It was noted that discussions are taking place with the IIP Assessor regarding a Management Charter.

CEO

CEO

5.3 Review of Public Administration

The CEO reported that he and the Chairman had a very positive meeting with Brian Hanna (Chairman) and Adrian Kerr (CEO) of the Local Government Staff Commission. Discussions covered the implications of the RPA for current and future employment relations in local government, the industrial relations machinery required for the new local government structures and the support that the Agency might provide to the LGSC. The CEO had written to Adrian Kerr in relation to the Agency's support for the LGSC in promoting and developing good employment relations in local government.

CEO

5.4 Equal Pay Audit

Nothing further was raised regarding this item.

5.5 Draft Report to those charged with Governance

This item was deferred to 7.2 – Report on the Audit Sub-Committee on 15 June 2009.

5.6 Monthly Management Report

The Chairman read a letter which he had received from F G Wilson (Engineering) which acknowledged the support from LRA staff during a recent redundancy exercise. The letter expressed appreciation to the Agency's staff for their time and assistance. The input F G Wilson had received from the Agency had been an invaluable resource to allow for the effective management of the process.

The Chairman also referred to the DEL Review of the Agency. The Terms of Reference for the Review are going to the Minister this week. The proposed Review will be the subject of a tendering exercise. It was agreed that the value and the quality of the work of the Agency should be examined in anticipation of what could be raised at the Review.

CEO

Director (Advisory Services)

DAS referred to a pilot scheme regarding the promotion of effective industrial relations in schools. It was agreed that it may be useful to

consider how this might apply to the University sector.

CEO/DAS

It was noted that the CEO and DCA had attended a University and College Union AGM and Dinner in Derry on 23/24 June. Lyn Fawcett, speaking as Chair of the UCU Northern Ireland Committee, expressed his gratitude for their attendance and the presentation the CEO provided to delegates in relation to developments in ADR.

Director (Corporate Services)

DCS reported that the IS/IT project was on target and the security accreditation process was at the second stage. An update will be provided at the August Board Meeting.

DCS

It is anticipated that a new lease for the three units in Gordon Street will be signed shortly.

DCS

It was noted that an Architect has been temporarily appointed to provide architectural services to the Agency in support of a number of premises projects.

5.7 Draft format for Agency Performance Reports

Following discussion it was agreed to defer consideration of the draft format to the August Board meeting.

CEO

6. Annual Report & Accounts

Copies of the Draft LRA Annual Report and Accounts for 2008/09 were provided to Board Members.

7. Audit Sub-Committee

7.1 Minutes of the Audit Sub-Committee meeting held on 18 March 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2009 were ratified by the Board. Proposed by Lyn Fawcett, seconded by Trevor Morrow.

7.2 Meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee held on 15 June 2009

Roden Ward gave a verbal report of the Audit Sub-Committee meeting held on 15 June 2009. He referred to the Draft Report to those charged with Governance, produced by the NI Audit Office. It had been agreed by the Committee to accept the contents of the Report.

With regard to the LRA Annual Report and Accounts 2008/09, the Audit Committee recommended the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts. The Board then agreed to adopt the Annual Report and Accounts.

It was noted that revised terms of reference for the Audit Committee will be submitted to the Board in September.

CEO/DCS

Following discussion the Board approved the 2008/09 annual report to the Board by the Chairman of the Agency's Audit Committee.

Following discussion Trevor Morrow agreed to serve on the Audit Committee to replace Norma Heaton. Peter Williamson also agreed to serve on the committee as Chair when Roden Ward retires from the Board at the end of September 2009.

8. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board

It was noted that no correspondence had been received.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Presentation to Eilis Murray

A presentation was made to Eilis Murray in recognition of her 25 years' service with the Agency.

9.2 Presentation to Tom McComb

A presentation was also made to Tom McComb to mark his retirement from the Agency.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board will be held on **Thursday, 27 August 2009**, beginning at 10.00 am in Room 1.