MINUTES OF DfT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday 11 January 2011
Time: 0900-1050
Venue: Room 5/13, Great Minster House

ExCo Members

Lin Homer (Chair)
Bronwyn Hill
Richard Hatfield
Steve Gooding
Clare Moriarty
Christopher Muttukumaru

Attendees for Agenda Items

Phil Carey (Item 2)
Malcolm Twite (Item 3)
Helen Morris (Item 5)
**** (Change Team) (Item 5)

Other Attendees

**** (Private Office)
**** (Board Secretariat)

Item 1: Introductory Comments from Lin Homer

1. Lin said that she was glad to be at DfT and that all people she had met so far, including Ministers, had displayed a positive attitude to the challenges facing the Department. She would be requesting a significant amount of briefing over the coming days. However it would not all be written briefing and she would be quite content to receive existing briefing, such as the rail briefings that the Secretary of State had found so useful.

2. At the meeting with the Secretary of State on organisational change, which would be taking place two days later, it would be necessary to re-iterate the fundamental principles behind the programme and how it would deliver the necessary efficiencies. Officials would also need to be clear beforehand as to what decisions they required from him.

Item 2: DfT’s 24/7 Response Capability

EC(11)01

3. Phil Carey introduced the paper, which reported that a recent study by the In House Policy Research unit had identified that the £118k per annum spent on the duty office function represented good VfM for DfT. The Duty Office had provided useful back-up during the recent volcanic ash and winter weather crises and it was considered that now would not be a suitable time to put additional pressure on line units, including the accident investigation branches which were going through major restructuring.

4. The paper proposed that the Duty Office continue in its current format for a further year, after which its status would be reviewed once again with alternatives, such as remote provision of the duty office function, or

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requiring areas with 24/7 needs to provide their own cover, being considered. In the meantime the following issues required consideration:

i. Duty Officers would be asked to sign opt-outs from the EU Working Time Directive
ii. additional reserve officers would need to be recruited;
iii. job profiles currently being designed for PB1-7s would need to set out 24/7 duties where required; and
iv. the current on-call allowances structure would need to be reviewed, given that the current structure made it difficult for the full range of staff to take on 24/7 responsibilities.

5. Phil would be leaving DfT the following week; John Fuller as interim successor would return to ExCo in March reporting on progress in agreeing how 24/7 capability should be delivered in the new organisation.

6. ExCo agreed that closing down the Duty Office in a year’s time, prior to the Olympics, was unlikely to be considered sensible – the likelihood was that it would continue in operation for the next two years at least.

7. Clare Moriarty noted that, according to the paper, the £80k annual cost of Duty Officer allowances had been included specifically as a CSR saving. The Secretary of State had made it clear that any proposals that would result in agreed savings not being delivered must be approved by him, with a clear exposition of how the savings would be substituted. If ExCo was minded to accept the recommendation in the paper, this would be subject to agreement with the Secretary of State, which should be sought by the policy team after discussion with Group Finance.

   **Action:** Phil Carey

8. ExCo was aware that HR was currently under great pressure resulting from the Organisational Change programme. Reviewing the on-call allowance structure would therefore have to be classified as a medium-term task.

9. ExCo agreed to the recommendations set out in the paper, subject to Secretary of State approval in respect of the savings substitution, and agreed to review the duty office function in a year’s time.

**Item 3: London Accommodation Strategy – Outstanding Issues**

10. Malcolm Twite had submitted a substantive London Accommodation Strategy paper to ExCo on 14 December and this follow-up paper addressed the issues raised by ExCo then.

11. The revised London Accommodation Strategy stated that, following the reorganisation and re-stack, net additions to staff numbers should be accommodated by the adoption of non-territorial working (“hot desking”) by expanding teams. ExCo agreed it was important to establish the principle that responsibility for managing pressure on accommodation lay with the

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business units rather than the property team. However, it was more practical to expect pressures to be absorbed at Group rather than team level.

12. Lin Homer noted that the strategy was silent on the broader question of non-territorial working, which many Departments were now adopting. Malcolm explained that the balance of cost and benefit depended on the flexibility of space – e.g. whether there was scope to reduce the overall amount of space occupied – and the investment required to achieve a successful move to non-territorial working. It was agreed that the current and potential future position on this should be explained in the strategy.

   Action: Malcolm Twite

13. ExCo approved the updated London Accommodation Strategy, subject to its comments above.

14. DGs agreed to nominate one representative each for the Sounding Board for the re-stacking of Great Minster House (North).

   Action: DGs

15. Malcolm Twite advised that the Corporate Communications team was currently going through the Strategy. Once it had completed this, with the further amendments requested by ExCo having been made, and the Sounding Board had been set up, the Strategy would be published on Transnet.

**Item 4: January Pressures Plan**

16. The January Pressures Plan, which ExCo agreed should be expanded until the end of March, was updated. The following issues arose from the discussion:

   i) The session previously discussed to update Directors on the Organisational Change Programme and discuss the Staff Survey results had not yet taken place and would still be worthwhile.

   ii) It would be helpful to distinguish Business Plan commitments from other planned policy activity, in order to understand which really cannot be allowed to slip.

   iii) For completeness, the plan should record what had eventually happened on the various items once dates were passed.

   iv) There was some advantage in extending the plan to cover February and March, since the selection process would produce significant pressures during those months for both SCS and PB1-7

   Action: Clare Moriarty to ask Umran Nazir to amend Plan in light of points ii)-iv)

   v) The changes to DG responsibilities had drawn attention to the fact that there was no clear DG champion for countering severe

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weather. This would need to be resolved before the next bout of severe weather.

**Action:** Richard Hatfield/Steve Gooding to resolve

### Item 5: Ministerial Support following Restructure EC(11)05

**Introduction**

17. This paper proposed a number of recommendations to put to Ministers that would streamline the service provided to them from officials. Included in the recommendations was a proposal that PQs, and advice on meeting requests, need no longer be signed off at SCS level.

18. Central to the rationale behind these proposals was that it was important for the credibility of the Organisational Change Programme that new ways of working should apply across the Department’s business.

**Discussion**

19. ExCo was keen that any proposals to Ministers should address the concerns they had expressed with regard to the service currently offered to them. Use of poor grammar in draft responses to PQs and correspondence was a regular cause of concern to more than one Minister.

20. “Naming and shaming” of people who sent up poorly drafted responses was not supported. However, when problems arose, using management information to target specific areas was more efficient than imposing additional “safety blanket” requirements on everyone. ExCo felt that Private Secretaries needed to speak more to DGs about problem areas within their Groups.

**Action:** Lin Homer to speak to Natasha Robinson

21. A common problem was identified in people viewing the answering of PQs as a distraction from their ‘day jobs’. Lin Homer said there was a need for DfT to recognise good drafting skills and to reward people who provided high-quality responses to PQs and correspondence.

**Action:** Clare Moriarty to ask HR to consider how best to do this

22. A need was agreed for concise, accurate responses to be provided to PQs in particular – and for these responses, once agreed by Ministers, to be reused when responding to similar questions.

23. ExCo also agreed that greater transparency in making information available to the public would cut down on the time spent answering FOI requests.

**Action:** Christopher Muttukumaru to consider how best to take this forward

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24. ExCo was informed that Private Office had some reservations about the proposal to abolish the requirement for PQ responses to be signed off at SCS level. It was suggested that this might be tried out on an experimental basis, with a clear understanding that responses considered inadequate by Private Office would be swiftly rejected and then reviewed at SCS level.

Conclusions

25. ExCo requested that the proposition to Ministers be amended in accordance with its comments. In particular, it requested that the tone of the proposal be changed to make it clear that officials were keen to enhance the service they provided to Ministers, but that they required some changes from Ministers in return.

Action: **** (Change Team)

Item 6: Organisational Change

26. ExCo members discussed how to prepare for their meeting two days later with the Secretary of State to discuss the Organisational Change Programme. The need for further such meetings was considered likely.

27. One of the key issues was how we treated the indicative cost reduction boundaries that had been set for the various parts of the admin budget. These had been put in place to enable DfT to plan for delivery of the overall target. It was agreed that, ultimately, delivery of the overall 33% admin reduction was the key target. Variance in the level of reduction for individual parts of admin spend (e.g. pay, consultancy) was acceptable as long as delivery of the overall target was assured.

Board Secretariat
12 January 2011