

Ministerial Board Meeting

Minutes of the Board meeting held on 20 May 2010

Present:

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP – Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Chair)

Greg Clark MP – Minister for Decentralisation

Grant Shapps MP – Minister for Housing and Local Government

Andrew Stunell OBE, MP – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Bob Neill MP – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Baroness Hanham, CBE – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Peter Housden, Permanent Secretary

Irene Lucas, Director-General

Joe Montgomery, Director-General

Richard McCarthy, Director-General

David Prout, Director-General

Shirley Pointer, Director-General

David Rossington, Director-General

Stephen Park, Interim Senior Director of Finance

Secretariat:

Nick Dexter

Jamie Cowling

Nick Burkitt

Rebecca Pearse

Item 1: Ministerial Priorities

1. The Secretary of State gave a presentation on his priorities. His key message to the department was that his priority was localism. CLG's overall aim should be a real and sustainable transfer of power from Whitehall to local authorities. This should form the basis of CLG's relationships with partners. Key elements of this agenda would be a reduction in the budget deficit, decentralising and encouraging social enterprise. The Government should offer real choice to the public by increasing local accountability and by putting real power to choose in people's hands. This might mean that there was less uniformity of performance across local authorities but this would help reinvigorate local democracy. The next Ministerial Board meeting should focus on our achievements on localism – what we have accomplished in the first month of the new government.
2. The Secretary of State invited his Ministerial colleagues to comment on his presentation. In discussion, the following points were made:

- the general power of competence for local authorities was very important. The French model of collaboration without a formal structures should be examined.
 - localism was an exciting and challenging agenda. Cooperation between local authorities was vital as was making sure that local authorities were properly funded and that funding was put to good use. Establishing the Government's procurement agenda would act as a gateway to delivering wider reforms.
 - a key measure of the success of the department's work on localism would be an increase in turnout at future local elections. By scrapping regional plans and introducing incentive schemes, local authorities would be encouraged to make rational decisions on developing housing for their areas. This would foster proper democratic argument and debate and councils would have a stronger mandate from the public and higher quality councillors.
 - localism was vital to both the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. The challenge for the department was to lead on this agenda across both central and local government.
3. Peter Housden and the Directors-General responded to the Secretary of State's presentation. They said that the Secretary of State's messages needed to be heard widely in the organisation. Messages on localism were very powerful and staff would be committed to implementing them. The department's influence across government on this agenda was the real prize.
 4. The Secretary of State concluded by saying that both Ministers and officials would face problems but it would be important to act as a close-knit team and quickly identify problems and resolve them together.

Item 2: Purpose of the Board and Terms of Reference

5. Peter Housden introduced a discussion about the operation of the Board. He explained that the departmental board had been based on a standard model across Whitehall. The Board was advisory to the accounting officer and consisted of the Directors-General and Non Executive Directors. The Board had not previously involved Ministers though two or three Ministerial and Board awaydays had been held each year which had been useful. The highest performing departments had involved Ministers more systematically in Board discussions.
6. The Secretary of State responded to Peter Housden's presentation. The Board would meet monthly and would act like a Committee or third reading stage of a Bill – it would monitor and motivate and examine key issues.

Item 3: Integrated Performance Report and Risk Register

7. David Rossington explained that the Integrated Performance Report and risk register had been tools used by the Board on a monthly basis to examine progress on the department's key policy and programmes and highlight any risks. He sought the Ministerial team's views on whether this was the sort of information they would wish to see on a monthly basis.
8. The Secretary of State said that he thought it would be useful for the Integrated Performance Report to be circulated to Ministers before the Board meetings so they could take an overview of progress. Baroness Hanham would review this information and reports from the Audit and Risk Committee.

Action: Board Secretariat to send Baroness Hanham a regular update on the work of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Item 4: Concluding remarks

9. The Secretary of State said that he would like the department to respond to letters from MPs within a fortnight and to try to keep answers to a single page. This would help build up a strong relationship with MPs. Baroness Hanham said that it was important that equal weight was given to correspondence from the House of Lords.
10. Grant Shapps explained that briefing from officials was high quality but often very long and detailed. It was important not to repeat messages in documents and keep briefs to one or two sides.

Action: Directors-General to disseminate these messages to staff.

**Board Secretariat
May 2010**