

Minutes of the Office of Fair Trading Board Meeting

Thursday 4 September 2008

Present:

Philip Collins (Chairman)
John Fingleton (CEO)
Jonathan May
Vivienne Dews
Lord Blackwell
Bronwyn Curtis
Alan Giles
James Hart
Frederic Jenny
Tony Lea
Richard Whish

OFT Staff:

Frances Barr
Sophia Bhatti
Louis Christofides
Heather Clayton
Claire Craig
Amelia Fletcher
John Gibson
Ed Smith
Jennifer West
Barney Wyld
Juliet Young

Executive Office:

Francesca Seymour (Board Secretary)

In attendance for Item 6:

Simon Pritchard
Cavendish Elithorn
Frances Barr

Observing:

Philip Marsden
Claire Hart

Item 1: Minutes of the last meeting (3 July) OFT(08)7thminutes

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Item 2: Prioritisation: principles and process

The Board was updated on the progress made on the prioritisation principles following the consultation period, which ran from September 2007 until January 2008. The team is in the process of 'road testing' how these principles will be applied across the organisation, and there is early evidence to suggest that provision of light touch guidance on applying the principles will be welcomed.

The Board acknowledged that the principles had to be applied flexibly and pragmatically rather than as a set of rigid criteria and should provide a systematic framework for use by Senior Directors and OFT Committees, thus improving decisions about which projects to take forward.

An internal audit of the system will take place when the system has had a chance to bed down (in 2-3 years time).

The Board was content that the prioritisation principles be published.

Item 3: Newspaper and Magazine distribution

The Board discussed progress and the proposed next steps.

Item 4: Market study

The Board was presented with the findings of a short market study, and approved its publication by the end of September.

Item 5: 2008/09 Spend

The Board was updated on the OFT's overall financial position, taking into account the annual reduction in spend under the CSR07 settlement of 5 per cent. The finance team is seeking to improve budgeting and spending forecasts, which will enable better decision-making, and is also looking at affordable staff plans.

The Board noted that it would need to review in October what steps might have to be taken to ensure that we remained within budget both this year and for the following years of CSR07. Discussions with Treasury continue.

Item 6: ExCo report to the Board

CEO

The OFT Way

The CEO had held a seminar with the Senior Executive Team focussing on methods and styles of working within the OFT to deliver the OFT Vision and Values. Work is now underway on practical implementation. A more detailed update will be provided at the November Board meeting.

Speaking engagements

The CEO referred to forthcoming speaking engagements.

Andy Bearne

The Board was advised that Andy Bearne, a member of the banking team, had died during a parachuting holiday.

Executive Director, Corporate Services

Staff issues

Christine Cryne has resigned and will be taking up the role of CEO for a small charity. David Fisher has taken on her role, and Claire Craig will therefore be looking for someone to support her on strategy in relation to Trading Standards.

A permanent Head of Procurement has been appointed.

Executive Director, Markets and Projects & Policy and Strategy

Banks

A half-day discussion with the banks is taking place on 18 September to consider the way forward. A report on the way forward will be published in early 2009.

National Audit Office review

The NAO has completed its work, and a draft report is due in early October, and will be published in December.

Article 82

The CEO reported on progress on the draft guidelines.

Director, Communications

Media

The Summer has been quiet. There has been good coverage of the PCA market study in July, and of the irresponsible lending consultation. The Comms team is looking to work more with the Credit Group in the coming months.

Staff issues

All the Comms team is now in place and the re-structuring of the area is almost complete.

Item 7: Market Investigation References (MIR)

The Board discussed the MIR regime and the roles of the OFT and the CC in relation to the regime.

Item 8: Points from Below the Line Items

House Building

The Board approved the publication of the house building study (scheduled for 25 September). The team was congratulated on its work in undertaking a study of this scope and scale against the background of a difficult economic period for the industry.

Risk Management

The Board noted the content of this paper.

Item 9: Any other business

Resource Accounts

The Board noted that the Resource Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2008 had been duly approved by the sub-committee of the Board comprising Tony Lea, Alan Giles and Norman Blackwell on 14 July 2008.

Authorisation from the Board to the Chairman

The Board discussed the terms of the authorisations to the Chairman.

Board in Scotland

Planning for the stakeholder meetings is going well. A more detailed programme will be available on 16 September.

Future meetings

There will be an 'NED only' one hour discussion following the November meeting, and a Board dinner following the December meeting. Subject to final confirmation on dates, it is planned that Richard Lambert (CBI) and Lord Whitty and Ed Mayo (NCC) will speak at forthcoming meetings.

Francesca Seymour
Board Secretary
5 September 2008