

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 15 OCTOBER 2021

10.00 AM – CRUMLIN ROAD GAOL

438th MEETING – 34th OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE

ATTENDANCE

Mr D Ashford, Chair
Dr J Byrne
Mr K Donaghy (via video conferencing)
Mr P Douglas
Mrs J Gillespie
Ms P Keenan
Mr M Murray (via video conferencing)
Mr G OhEara
Mr D Wall

Ms D Gilchrist 'Boardroom Apprentice'

OFFICIALS

Ms A Stewart, Chief Executive
Dr G O'Hare, A/Director of Rehabilitation
Ms C Sweeney, Head of HR & OD
Mr A MacKenzie, Interim Head of Finance & Estates
Mr M Cox, Board Secretary
Mrs W Rodgers, Secretariat (Minutes)

1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted it was the first face-to-face Board meeting since before the pandemic. He advised all the participants to wear masks and to maintain social distancing. He also welcomed the new Chief Executive and Boardroom Apprentice to their first meeting.

There were no conflicts of interest advised. A quorum was confirmed.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were recorded from Mr N Bodger, Deputy Chair, Dr T Donaldson, Member and Ms G Montgomery, A/Director of Operations.

3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 17 SEPTEMBER 2021 (M08/21)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 17 September 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 89/21)

The Board Chair noted that action 1 is an agenda item at the next CRC for discussion and therefore should be regarded as complete.

The Board noted the paper.

5. BOARD CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Board Chair provided members with an update of his meetings and events attended since the last Board meeting.

The Board Chair informed members that he had met with the Chief Executive on a number of occasions and that he is looking forward to working with her.

The Chairs Forum had met to discuss the difficulties around the RQIA report and there is a seminar scheduled for 24 November 2021 on the learning points.

The Minister for Justice visited Headquarters on 30 September 2021 and during her visit she met staff who were attending the '#Hidden Heroes' Event.

As this Board's tenure is nearing its end, the Board Chair requested that any outstanding appraisal forms be forwarded to Secretariat without delay.

Action: All outstanding appraisal forms to be forwarded to the Board Chair. (Board Members)

The Board Development Day, following this meeting, is the first opportunity for the Board and Officials to meet face to face since the outbreak of the pandemic. The conversation will be shaped by the end of the current Board's term with the new Board being appointed in March 2022. The Chief Executive, 2 weeks into her role, will give her immediate perspective on the future of the Organisation.

The Chief Executive and Board Chair have carried out a number of office visits where they met with staff. The Board Chair commented that he continues to be impressed by the staff's professionalism. He also attended the service held in Clonard Monastery as part of 'Prison's Week'.

Paul King, has been appointed as Head of Finance & Estates and he will join the Organisation on 1 November 2021.

The Board noted the update

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive stated she was delighted to be appointed and to meet the Board Members in person. She will give her perspective later in the day.

7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 82/21)

There was one item of correspondence to note.

7.1 RQIA Review of Services for Vulnerable Persons Detained in Northern Ireland Prisons

The Board noted the correspondence.

8. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER UPDATE (PAPER 91/21)

The Board Chair invited the Officials to summarise the report for members.

The A/Director of Rehabilitation informed members that there had been no Serious Further Offence (SFO) to report since the last Board Meeting.

The A/Director of Rehabilitation provided a summary of the Information Systems as laid out in the paper. The Organisation has moved to Phase 3 of the Covid Recovery Plan. It is now moving towards a 'hybrid approach' of working for staff. Members were informed that PBNI have committed to the Lateral Flow Test Programme as described in the report.

Details of Communications and Engagement activity were set out in the paper. There continues to have a lot of proactive activity, particularly on Twitter. Members noted that Probation is currently responding to one consultation with a closing date of 11 November 2021.

There were 6 complaints received in Quarter 2, which were mainly from service users about the information held. There were 28 requests under the DPA or FoI arrangements, received during the quarter. There are 25 live legal cases; 8 are for Compensation / Health and Safety claims and 17 Judicial Reviews from service users.

A member asked about the benefits of an automated Pre-sentence Report (PSR) system and was advised that it would remove the need for manual input from ICOS (Integrated Court Operating System) to Electronic Case Management System. Causeway would also improve the new technical solution for sending and receiving information works successfully.

The Head of HR & OD provided an update on HR matters and attendance levels as provided in the paper. The Head of HR & OD advised that there continues to be problems in recruiting and retaining social worker qualified staff. There have been 28 people recruited but there are still 14 vacancies. The Pay Remit 2019/20 for senior staff has been resubmitted to the DOJ, answering the queries. The Corporate Staff's pay remits for 2020/21 and 2021/22 have been submitted. The DOJ has raised a number of queries, which HR and Finance are considering. Work on the Pay Review continues. There was no developments on the NILGOSC legal challenge.

A meeting with the Unions was arranged for 18 October to discuss the submissions and suggestions made at the Culture Workshops. The meeting was positive.

The Absence Report is appended to this report for members' information. Work on Wellbeing continues as set out in appendix 2.

The Corporate Resources Chair, Mrs Gillespie, requested that there be a discussion at the next CRC meeting on the cost of recruitment and what is achieved from it.

Action: CRC to discuss the cost of recruitment and what is achieved from it. (CRC_

The Interim Head of Finance & Estates provided an update on Estates and Business Cases as set out in the paper. He summarised the work currently being carried out on the Estate and the current position of business cases. It was noted that the lease on Headquarters will expire in November 2024 with a break clause in the lease in September 2022.

A member commented that the significance of the IT Solution Strategy. He also noted that there were 17 Judicial Reviews, which was the cause of some concern.

The Board noted the paper.

9. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS

9.1 Board Secretary's Update

The Board Secretary drew members' attention to the change of meeting dates in February 2022. This was to facilitate the Board coming to the end of its extended tenure. The intention is to ensure all business is completed by 28 February 2022. The members were advised of the dates and amended diary invitations have been sent. The Governance Action Plan was presented to the Committee Chairs Working Group (CCWG) at its last meeting. The Plan will be updated and the final version will be brought to the February Board.

Members were advised that minutes of all committee meetings are available on 'Decision Time' under 'Resources' for all members to view. It was noted that an updated version of the Register of Interests has been published on the PBNI Website.

The Board noted the update.

9.2 Board Work Plan 2021/22 (Paper 92/21)

The Board Secretary advised that the Work Plan has been revised to take account of the Board's tenure being extended to the end of February 2022. It was important to ensure that all work is completed and all minutes signed before the end of this Board's tenure.

The Board noted the paper.

10. BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN 2021

The A/Director of Rehabilitation advised that the Business Continuity plan is reviewed every year. The Plan has been developed and continues to be implemented during the pandemic. The Covid Recovery Plan flows from the Business Continuity Plan.

The Board Chair and Board thanked the Officials for the way the Organisation has adapted and used the Business Continuity Plan to ensure service delivery.

The Board noted the paper.

11. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE – AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)

There was not an update provided on ARAC as there has not been a meeting since the last Board. There are no emerging issues to note. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 5 November 2021. The Board Chair advised that the Corporate Governance Audit is commencing. The Interim Head of Finance & Estates informed that the TORs had been received.

The Board noted the update.

12. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE - CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE (CRC)

Mrs Gillespie, Committee Chair, informed members that there had not been a meeting of the Committee since the last Board meeting and there were no emerging issues to bring to the Board's attention. The next meeting of the Committee is 22 October 2021.

The Board noted the update.

12.1 Financial Outturn – September 2021 (Paper 95/21)

The Interim Head of Finance & Estates provided a summary of the presented paper. He advised the position in respect of financial pressures is looking more positive. Members were reminded that the underspend to date was mainly due to the timing of payments in respect of contracted out services and COVID-19 cleaning and PPE.. The potential annual overspend has reduced by about half due to the sale of the Antrim Road premises and staff vacancies. The Interim Head of Finance & Estates provided a timeline on the submission to the Department for the January Monitoring Round. Discussions have recommenced on the Probation's VAT status, and it is hoped to bring this to a successful conclusion. Performance on Prompt Payment targets has slipped due to resourcing issues.

The Board noted the paper.

13. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE - POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE (PPC)

Mr Wall, Committee Chair, informed members that there had not been a meeting of the Committee since the last Board meeting and there were no emerging issues to bring to the Board's attention. The next meeting of the Committee is 29 October 2021. He advised that there is a full agenda for the meeting. Mr Wall provided an update on the Annual Seminar, which is to be held on 19 January 2022.

The Board noted the update.

14. OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Gillespie advised that she had previously informed the Board of a potential conflict of interest arising from her involvement in examining mother and baby homes, Magdalene laundries and historical clerical child abuse. She advised that due to the length of time required to set up a panel for a public enquiry, she could not see any conflict of interest occurring before the end of this Board's tenure. She will keep the Board advised of any developments.

The Board Chair thanked all members and officials for attending.

The meeting ended at 10.45 am to be followed by the Board Development Day.

D Ashford QFSM
Board Chair

Date