

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 18 DECEMBER 2020**

**9.30 AM – WEBEX VIDEO CONFERENCE**

**429<sup>th</sup> MEETING – 25<sup>th</sup> OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE**

ATTENDANCE

Mr D Ashford, Chair  
Mr N Bodger  
Dr J Byrne  
Dr K Clark (Items 8-17)  
Dr T Donaldson  
Mr K Donaghy  
Mr P Douglas  
Mrs J Gillespie (Items 8-17)  
Ms P Keenan  
Mr M Murray  
Mr G OhEara  
Mr D Wall

OFFICIALS

Ms C Lamont, Chief Executive  
Mr, H Hamill, Director of Operations  
Dr G O'Hare, Director of Rehabilitation  
Mrs G Robinson, Head of HR  
Ms C Teggart, Head of Finance  
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 Board meeting, which continues to be conducted via video conferencing.

The Board Chair wished to thank Board Members, the Management Team and staff for their work throughout a difficult year in light of the pandemic. He commented that staff have continued to work with professionalism and have remained upbeat.

No potential Conflicts of Interest were declared.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies recorded from Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications and Mrs J Anderson, Boardroom Apprentice.

**3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 20 NOVEMBER 2020 (M12/20)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 20 November 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 103/20)**

The Board Chair requested that any outstanding Board appraisal forms be returned to him so Action 1 can be completed. Members were advised that Action 4 has now been completed. All other actions were noted as completed.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **5. BOARD CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Board Chair advised members of the sad passing of our Probation colleague, Joanne Devenney. He had written on behalf of the Board to Joanne's husband offering condolences. He also advised members of the sad passing of Mr O'Hara's mother and he had passed on condolences to him on behalf of the Board.

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

There have been a number of Chairs Forum events, which the Board Chair attended virtually. The Governance seminar was useful and the Comptroller and Auditor General, provided input. The Board Chair will provide members with some headlines on this. The meeting was held via 'REMO' software, which was a successful way of holding a seminar.

Members were advised that the ALB Review has been submitted to Connor Murphy, Minister of Finance for his consideration. There has been no indication as to what is in the Review but it is understood that there are likely to be 3 potential options for each ALB, i.e no change, merge or close.

The Partnership Agreement discussions have started again with the implementation group expected to resume.

The software for 'Decision Time' will be updated in January. Members will be informed when the new version is available.

The Board Chair attended a virtual coffee morning for staff with 70 people attending via WebEx. He thank all of those who organised the event.

As an action from the last Board, the Board Chair met, virtually, with Mr Drew of the HSCNI to discuss cooperation between Health and Probation. This was a positive meeting and ideas for cooperation will be sent to Dr O'Hare.

The Committee Chairs Working Group will be meeting after this meeting.

The Board noted the update

#### **6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

The Board Chair invited the Chief Executive to provide the Board with her update since the last Board meeting.

The Chief Executive advised members of the passing of Joanne Devenney in tragic circumstances. Joanne had worked for Probation for 6 years and was a very popular member of staff, who will be missed across the Organisation. Mrs Robinson, Head of HR,

and Paul Devlin, Area Manager, have visited Joanne's husband and are providing support for her work colleagues.

The CJI (NI) Report was published on 7 December 2020 and is an agenda item for this meeting.

The Annual Public Protection Advisor Seminar was held on 27 November 2020. Both justice ministers, Helen McEntee and Naomi Long, provided input to the meeting with the significant work of the Probation Service, Ireland and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland being acknowledged.

The Chief Executive attended the Senior Civil Servants Forum where Mr Peter May, DOJ Permanent Secretary, indicated that it is likely to be a flat line budget settlement. There has been no confirmation of budget to date but the Chief Executive advised that she would be writing to Dr Harrison of the DOJ about the funding of Problem Solving Justice and Fresh Start Projects.

Members were updated on the establishment of a Programme Board to consider the legislative changes in respect of the supervision of Terrorist Related Offenders (TROs). This has been set up. Mr Hamill, Director of Operations, will represent PBNI on the Board.

The Chief Executive through Mr Hamill, as the senior lead, will keep members updated on the (indicative) legislative timetable and transitioning to the new model as PBNI becomes informed.

The Chief Executive wished to put on record her thanks to the Chair and Board Members for their constructive challenge and support throughout this very challenging year and to her Executive colleagues for their support throughout the year.

The Board noted the update.

## **7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 88/20)**

The correspondence was no correspondence to note.

The Board noted the paper

## **8. UPDATE ON CJI(NI) ACTION PLAN (VERBAL)**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the CJI (NI) Report on Probation has been published. Mr Hamill advised that there was some press coverage but there was no follow-up media queries. Members were informed that in order to achieve total transparency, staff have received the Report and Action Plan.

Strategic Priority 1 is a recommendation for the DOJ to take forward and the Board Chair confirmed that he intends to write to Dr Harrison, Director of Safer Communities, to offer his support in achieving an outcome to this priority.

Mr Hamill provided a summary of each Strategic and Operational Priority as laid out in the Action Plan under 'updates'.

The Board Chair advised that Mr Cox, Board Secretary, had recommended which Strategic Priorities should be allocated to which Committee for review. The Action Plan will be a standing item on each committee's agenda.

The Board Chair commented that a lot of progress had been made to date but he asked if there was anything that was causing the Officials particular concern. Mr Hamill advised that the key issue was embedding and evidencing change in practice. To this end, he advised on the monitoring process, which has been put in place. Mrs Robinson highlighted any delay in addressing pay could have an adverse impact on morale and how staff view the Organisation. The Chief Executive clarified that the Board's oversight would be on the Strategic Recommendations. Officials will provide assurance to the Board on progress against the Operational Recommendations. This was agreed.

The Board noted the paper.

## **9. COVID 19 UPDATE (VERBAL)**

Mrs Robinson advised that the latest announcement from the Executive would require the SLT to meet to discuss the changes. It is hoped that there may be more clarity before they meet. Probation has returned to recovery phase 1. Staff will continue to be kept informed, as a priority.

Dr O'Hare, Director of Rehabilitation, advised that one Probation Officer would continue to be in attendance on each of the 3 prison sites each day for the foreseeable future.

The Board noted the update.

## **10. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER (PAPER 89/20)**

The Board Chair invited the Executive Team to take members through the Report. He again commented positively on the new format of the Report.

Mr Hamill advised that there were no Serious Further Offences to report since the last Board meeting.

Mr Hamill provided an update on the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS) and IT, more generally. Phase 2 of ECMS was successfully implemented on 7 December. It was confirmed that all departments now use ECMS.

Dr O'Hare, Director of Rehabilitation, provided an update on Communications and Engagement as laid out in the paper, advising that there had been a lot of activity on Twitter. The Chief Executive's podcasts continue to be well received by staff and the PPAG seminar was regarded as a success.

Dr O'Hare provided an update on consultations. Responses to 7 are currently being prepared. A consultation document on 'Safeguarding' was received on 17 December and Probation will respond to it.

Mrs Robinson provided an update on HR. She highlighted that the Probation pay review and pay negotiations are a major organisational issue and risk. Mrs Robinson stated that the Department had indicated it is difficult for them to support the claim because it was in excess of 2%. The cost is a pressure, which will be the subject of a bid to the January Monitoring. Discussion ensued on the risk to staff morale with other organisations, such as Health, now paying their staff more than Probation. At the most recent JNCC meeting, the unions made it clear that anything other than the pay uplift set out in the business case would be unacceptable.

The Board Chair advised that the Board, if required, could assist with engagement with the unions. There is a meeting in early January with the DOJ Officials to discuss the issue of the pay remit further. It was agreed to await the outcome of the meeting with the Department before taking further action.

The Attendance Report and Well-Being Report provided an update on the current sick absence rate. It has fallen by 29.6% with a projection of 11.8 days at the end of March 2021. While the reduction is welcomed, the rate is still high and HR and managers continue to support colleagues.

There has been no development regarding NILGOSC to report.

Ms Teggart, Head of Finance, provided a comprehensive update on estates and business cases. She advised that the Estates Team are working on delivering the Estates Strategy and on 'Covid' related work. Members were advised that the sale of Antrim Road has fallen through. This is worrying as the receipts from this sale are needed to balance the budget this year. Work on business cases for leases continues.

The Board noted the paper.

## **11. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS**

Mr Cox, Board Secretary, advised members that an outcome from the annual appraisal exercise for member was requests for Governance Training. A course has been arranged by L & D for 15 January 2021. Mr Cox will canvass members for a response by Tuesday 22 December 2020. It will be a half-day course via a virtual media. The Board Chair invited any members of the Executive Team to attend if they wished to.

**Action: Board Members to advise if they wish to attend the Governance Training on 15 January 2021 by Tuesday 22 December 2021 (Board Members)**

**Action: Executive Team to advise if they wish to attend the Governance Training on 15 January 2021 by Tuesday 22 December 2021. (Executive Team)**

The Board noted the update.

## **12. BOARD WORK PLAN (106/20)**

Mr Cox introduced the paper, which shows the scheduled work going to the Committees and Board in the next number of months.

The Board noted the paper.

## **13. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE – AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)**

Mr Bodger, Committee Chair, advised that there had not been a meeting since the last Board. Two emerging issues are the effects of 'Covid' and 'Brexit'. The next meeting of the Committee will be on 29 January 2021.

The Board noted the update.

## **14. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE - POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE (PPC)**

Mr Wall advised that there had not been a meeting since the last Board and there were no emerging issues. He, Dr O'Hare and Ms McGreevy, Head of Communications, will be

meeting early in the New Year to discuss the Annual Board Seminar, which is taking place on 3 February 2021. The Board and Committee will be updated on discussions. The next meeting of the Committee will be on 26 February 2021.

#### **15. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE - CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE (CRC)**

Mrs Gillespie, Committee Chair, advised that there had not been a meeting since the last Board. One area of concern is the pay issue, which the Committee will discuss and provide support to the Officials. The next meeting of the Committee will be on 5 February 2021.

Mrs Gillespie advised that there is a meeting of the Good Relations Group in January and if any members wish her to raise any questions please let her know.

The Board noted the update.

#### **16. FINANCIAL OUTTURN – NOVEMBER 2020 (PAPER 107/20)**

Ms Teggart provided an update on the November Financial Outturn as laid out in the paper, highlighting a number of points. There is an underspend of 3% on Resource expenditure, which is mainly due to underspends on travel and accommodation. The pay line is in an overspend position and members were advised of the reasons for this. The over spend of £147K for the pay remit for 2020/21 was not allocated in the January Monitoring Round, further discussion will take place in January with the DOJ as this will be a pressure going forward. Capital budget is in an overspend position due to the purchase of thermometers for offices, the Department are aware of this.

Financial planning for the next three years is underway, however it is anticipated that there will be a flat settlement for next year. The Chief Executive will be writing to the Department with reference to pressures around Problem Solving Justice funding. Also under review is the 10-year capital spend.

Prompt Payment Performance Targets are within acceptable levels with PBNI sitting above the NICS average.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **17. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other items of business reported. The Board Chair thanked members and officials for attending the meeting and wished all attendees a peaceful new year.

The next meeting of the Board will be 22 January 2021 via WebEx. The Board Chair advised that there were a number of challenges coming up in the New Year, particularly pay and the staff issues coming out of that.

Meeting ended at 10.55 am

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D Ashford QFSM  
**Board Chair**

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**Date**