

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 19 MARCH 2021

9.30 AM – WEBEX VIDEO CONFERENCE

432nd MEETING – 28th OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE

ATTENDANCE

Mr D Ashford, Chair
Mr N Bodger
Dr J Byrne (Items 1 – 12)
Dr K Clark
Dr T Donaldson
Mr K Donaghy
Mr P Douglas
Mrs J Gillespie
Ms P Keenan
Mr M Murray
Mr G OhEara
Mr D Wall

Mrs J Anderson, Boardroom Apprentice

OFFICIALS

Ms C Lamont, Chief Executive
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 meeting, which continues to be conducted via video conferencing.

He reminded members that this was Dr Clark's last meeting and he wished to thank her for her contribution to the Board and wished her well in her new role.

Members were also advised that it was the Head of HR's last Board meeting as she was leaving Probation to start a new role at the end of April. The Board Chair thanked her, on behalf of the Board, and wished her well in her new role. The Head of HR thanked the Board for its good wishes.

Mrs Gillespie advised of a potential Conflict of Interest as she is the Independent Chair of Inter Departmental Working Group to examine Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse. The Board Chair advised that there was not a conflict of interest at present but Mrs Gillespie would keep the board updated of

developments and he will keep the potential of conflict under review in case action is required. No other potential Conflicts of Interest were declared.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were recorded from Mr, H Hamill, Director of Operations and Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications

3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 19 FEBRUARY 2021 (M2/21)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 19 February 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

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

The Board Chair confirmed that all actions were noted as completed. Dr Byrne had requested, via the Board Chair, an update on the input of Mr H Campbell into the People's Strategy and his involvement with the focus groups being held with staff. The Head of HR advised that Mr Campbell had been involved but it was too early to provide feedback. It has been seen as positive that an independent person is taking part in these sessions, which provides assurance, confidence and trust for staff.

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.

He attended a Chairs Forum event, which the temporary Head of the Civil Service also attended in February. He had had a meeting with Dr Harrison of the DOJ when he discussed Board recruitment and the Board's concerns on budget, pay and 'Fresh Start'.

The Board Chair attended the PPC meeting on 26 February when Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Interim Mental Health Champion, gave a presentation on the challenges of addressing mental health within the Criminal Justice System. The Committee Chairs' Working Group met on 12 March 2021 and notes from the meeting will be circulated to members.

The Board Chair advised that there was no clarity on the recruitment of a new Board in November but he will keep members advised. The Board Chair thanked Mr Donaghy who had agreed to be a member of the selection panel for the Head of HR's replacement.

Finally, the Board Chair advised members of the new way the Committees are going to report their business to Board. This will be reviewed to ensure it is working.

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 wished to record her thanks, on behalf for the Senior Executive Team, to Dr Kelly Clark for her support, challenge and innovation during her time on the Board.

The Chief Executive also wished to place on record her thanks, and that of the Executive Team, to the Head of HR for her work, over 12 and half years, for Probation. The Head of HR had seen the Organisation through austerity, security issues and a pandemic with her professionalism and skill. The Chief Executive informed members that the recruitment process to appoint a Head of HR is under way.

The Chief Executive and Executive Team provided members with an update on the pay remit issue. The Head of Finance and HR had attended a meeting this week with the DOJ when further queries were raised. The Trade Unions are frustrated with the delays and may escalate their action.

Members discussed the concerns on staff retention due to better pay and conditions elsewhere in the public sector as well as avoiding the risks associated with delivering the Probation service. The option of escalating the risk to the Departmental Risk Register was also discussed. Following a lengthy discussion, it was agreed to write to the Director of Safer Communities, summarizing the issues and risks.

Action: Board Chair to write to the Director of Safer Communities. (Board Chair)

The Board agreed the next steps to progress the matter and noted the update.

7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 22/21)

There were four items of correspondence to note and discuss.

7.1 Letter from Justice Committee – Draft Budget 2021-22 plus response from PBNI

7.2 Letter from Justice Committee – Probation Inspection

7.3 Letter from Sean Holland - Practice Learning

The Members were briefed on each item presented, the Board noted the correspondence.

8. CJI(NI) ACTION PLAN QUARTERLY UPDATE (PAPER 23/21)

The Director of Rehabilitation presented the Action Plan to members. She advised that the Plan had been discussed at PPC and agreed by both SLT and the Transformation Programme Board. She advised members of the status of each recommendation as laid out in the paper.

The Board noted the paper.

9. COVID 19 UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Head of HR advised that the Organisation remained in Phase 1 of the Recovery Plan, following the Executive's guidelines. The Director of Rehabilitation is working on preparations for moving to the next phase when guidance allows. Podcasts have been produced to help staff with well-being and returning to work as well as physical and mental health. PPE is in place in each office.

The Board Chair congratulated the Head of HR on the work being carried out.

The Board noted the update.

10. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER (PAPER 24/21)

The Board Chair invited the Executive Team to take members through the Report.

The Director of Rehabilitation informed members that there had been no Serious Further Offences to report since the last Board meeting.

Members were advised that Probation had provided significant input to the Social Work Conference and communications continues as laid out in the paper. Response to consultations continues with details provided in the paper.

The Head of HR noted that the pay remit issue had already been discussed at this meeting. The NILGOSC issue remains outstanding with the Head of HR advising that, as it is a complex matter, she is willing to offer advice after she leaves. It was noted that absence has reduced by 35%, which is the lowest ever level in PBNI.

Ms Teggart provided an update on Estates and Business Cases. She advised that a property had been identified in Antrim for the new L & D facility. As previously advised the two properties' sales had fallen through but new offers had been received. It is hoped that receipts will be received in the next financial year.

The Board noted the paper.

11. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS

11.1 Programme for Government Consultation Response (Paper 25/21)

The Board Secretary advised members that the questionnaire and been completed and a draft letter to accompany it had been prepared. The Chair of the PPC informed members that the Committee had discussed the response to the consultation at length and was content with the proposed content. The Board Chair commented that the letter should accompany the questionnaire as it captures relevant information, which the questionnaire did not allow for. He also suggested that the information should also be sent to the Department.

The Board approved the content and submission of the response.

11.2 Board Annual Self-Assessment (Paper 37/21)

The Board Secretary informed members that the Governance Action Plan is the result of the Board's annual Self-Assessment exercise. He advised that there was nothing significant identified and both the Board Members and Officials responses were in line. The main focus for the Board is to conclude its work by the end of this Board's tenure in November. Mr Wall commented that he would welcome a Board Development Day before the end of the tenure to discuss the lessons learnt during the pandemic, the Board's performance, CJI(NI)'s inspection and how to improve going forward. The Board Chair agreed that he would also wish to have a development day.

The Board noted the paper

11.3 Board Work Plan (Paper 26/21)

The Board Secretary advised that the focus of the Work Plan was to ensure that all work is concluded by November 2021.

The Board noted the paper

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

Mr Bodger, Committee Chair, informed members that there had not been a meeting of the Committee since the last Board meeting and he confirmed that there were no emerging issues to bring to the Board's attention. The next meeting of the Committee is 7 May 2021.

The Board noted the update.

13. 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. She commented that the key issue is the finance papers. With one-year budgets continuing, it is difficult to plan and the Board should be concerned by the ongoing uncertainty. The next meeting of the Committee is 30 April 2021.

The Board noted the update.

13.1 Financial Outturn – February 2021 (Paper 27/21)

Ms Teggart provided an update on the February Financial Outturn as laid out in the paper. She took members through the causes of the underspend and overspend within the report. The sale of two properties falling through has caused pressures in capital expenditure, although the Department have been helpful with regard to the pressure created.

Ms Teggart provided an update on the Financial Planning exercise as laid out in the paper.

Prompt payment performance had reduced in February 2021 for due to the absence of a member of staff. Measures have been put in place to ensure that all invoices are processed by other members of staff during prolonged absences.

The Board noted the paper.

13.2 Balance Budget (Paper 28/21)

Ms Teggart advised that the paper provides an opportunity for Board Members to have an indication of the budget and assumptions for 2021/22. She took members through the paper and commented on the flat budget compared to the opening budget of 2020/21.

It has been advised that pressures will be dealt with through monitoring rounds instead of adding to the baseline at this stage. The potential issues are laid out in the paper.

Discussion followed on funding for Programme for Government and that these projects continue to be classed pilots. There was concern expressed on the risks of equality in rolling out these pilots as they are not currently available throughout Northern Ireland. The Chief Executive had previously raised this issue with the Department and is willing to do so again. It was noted by members that the Department lead on PFG and Probation is the provider.

The Board noted the paper.

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

Mr Wall provided a summary of the Committee meeting held on 26 February 2021. Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Interim Mental Health Champion, provided an interesting presentation, building on effective engagement with her post and agreement to set up research. The next Board seminar was discussed and a tentative date of 29 September 2021 was proposed. Discussion on the topic is an agenda item at the next meeting of the Committee and will be brought to the Board in June for comment and approval. The Committee was content with the Strategic Risks under its oversight. Mr Wall advised that the PPC had discussed the Good Relations and Equality Action Plan and was content with it; the Plan will be coming to the June Board for approval. Mrs Gillespie as the Board's Good Relation Champion had seen the Plan prior to it being brought to the Committee. The Committee's Work Plan will be reviewed to ensure that work is completed before November 2021.

Mr Wall advised that the Committee was content with all the policies being brought to the Board for approval at this meeting.

Mr Wall thanked Ms Mercer, DP Statistician, who has returned to NISRA, for her contribution to Probation and in particular her work on forecasting. Mr Wall also thanked the Director of Rehabilitation for her help and support with the Committee's work.

14.1 Business Plan Q3 2020/21 (Paper 29/21)

The Director of Rehabilitation took members through the Q3 Business Plan. It was noted that all six Strategic Priorities have a 'green' rating and she informed that it properly reflects the progress of the Plan.

The Board approved the Business plan Q3 2020/21.

14.2 Draft Business Plan 2021/22 (Paper 30/21)

The Director of Rehabilitation took members through the Draft Plan for 2021/22 and commented that the content was realistic and allowed for significant activity during the year. The DOJ have had sight of the Plan and was content with it. Following discussion by the Committee, it agreed to recommend approval to the Board

The Board approved the Draft Business Plan 2021/22.

14.3 Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures (Paper 31/21)

The PPC had discussed the Adult Safeguarding Policy in detail at its meeting on 26 February and agreed to recommend approval to the Board.

The Board approved the Adult Safeguarding Policy.

14.4 Flexible Working Policy (Paper 32/21)

The PPC had discussed the Flexible Working Policy in detail at its meeting on 26 February. The Committee agreed that the policy had the right control and balance. The Committee agreed to recommend approval to the Board.

The Board approved the Flexible Working Policy.

14.5 Code of Conduct for Staff (Paper 33/21)

The PPC had discussed the Code of Conduct for Staff in detail at its meeting on 26 February and agreed to recommend approval to the Board.

The Board approved the Code of Conduct for Staff

14.6 PBNI Employers Code of Practice (Paper 34/21)

The PPC had discussed the PBNI Employers Code of Practice in detail at its meeting on 26 February and agreed to recommend approval to the Board.

The Board approved the PBNI Employers Code of Practice.

14.7 Q3 Official Statistics (Paper 35/21)

The Director of Rehabilitation took members through the Q3 Official Statistical Report. She noted that the female sentenced population had decreased. Court business was returning to near normal. ECOs, which had reduced, are now returning to previous rates. This reflects on the work of PBNI with local sentencers. Registrations for the Victims Scheme have increase and the earlier release scheme continues.

The Board noted the paper.

14.8 Reoffending Statistics (Paper 36/21)

The Director of Rehabilitation summarized the Reoffending Statistics for the 2017/18 cohort noting that Probation has focused on age and gender of reoffending.

The Board noted the paper.

15. OTHER BUSINESS

Ms Keenan informed members and officials that the Peace Programme was out for consultation and there were many areas that may be of interest to Probation.

The Board Secretary advised members that if they had any outstanding expense claims that they must be submitted before 31 March 2021 to meet the end of the financial year cut off.

The Board Chair thanked the officials for their papers and everyone for attending the meeting.

The next meeting of the Board will be 23 April 2021 via WebEx. Meeting ended at 11.30 am

D Ashford QFSM , Board Chair

Date