

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 25 MARCH 2022**

**9.30 AM – ULSTER UNIVERSITY, BELFAST CAMPUS, BOARDROOM**

**444<sup>th</sup> MEETING – 1<sup>st</sup> OF THE THIRTEENTH TERM OF OFFICE**

ATTENDANCE

Mr M Murray, Chair  
Mr P Barnes  
Ms M Brunt  
Dr J Byrne  
Mr K Donaghy  
Mr B Ingram  
Mr J Johnston  
Dr M Keady  
Ms A Lloyd-Stevens  
Ms C Magee  
Ms B Mongan  
Ms E Patterson

OFFICIALS

Ms A Stewart, Chief Executive  
Ms G Montgomery, A/Director of Operations  
Dr G O'Hare, A/Director of Rehabilitation  
Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications  
Mr P King, Head of Finance & Estates  
Ms C Hyndman, A/Deputy Head of HR  
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 first meeting of this Board's tenure. He also welcomed Ms C Hyndman, A/Deputy Head of HR, who is deputising for Mrs Sweeney.

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

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were recorded from Mr N Bodger, Member; Mrs C Sweeney, Head of HR & OD and Ms D Gilchrist, Board Apprentice.

**3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 25 FEBRUARY 2022 (M03/22)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 25 February 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting. As returning members, Mr Donaghy proposed the minutes and Mr Murray seconded them.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 28/22)**

The Board Chair advised that the action from 25 February 2022 had been completed with the Minister of Justice's letter of reply for discussion under agenda item no 7.1 of this meeting. It was noted that there were no outstanding actions.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair welcomed newly appointed and returning members to the first meeting Board meeting of the thirteenth term of office which commenced on 1 March 2022.

The Board Chair provided members with an update of his meetings and events attended during the month of March 2022.

The Board Chair met with the Chief Executive when he was provided with a briefing on the current position of the Organisation and key issues. He will continue to meet with the Chief Executive weekly for updates.

He met with Julie Harrison, the Grade 3, of the Department of Justice together with Lorraine Montgomery, also from the Department, to discuss the DOJ sponsorship role of Probation in a general context and more specifically about funding. The proposed cut to the budget is 2% but in reality it is 5% when inflation and other factors are taken into account.

The Board Chair attended a virtual event on Crimestoppers, who provided information on how it works and the attendees were provided with examples of how Crimestoppers contribute to safe guarding communities.

The sale of the Crawford Square premises was finalised with the Board Chair signing the documents to conclude the sale. This has been an ongoing process but staff have moved and are settled in the new premises in Shipquay Street.

The pay remit has been approved. The Board Chair congratulated the Chief Executive and her staff for ensuring that the pay remit was approved for the financial year end before increases to National Insurance contributions come into effect in the 2022 -2023 financial year.

The Board noted the update.

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

The Chief Executive provided an update on meetings, visits and key issues since the last Board meeting.

The Chief Executive advised that her focus continues to be on understanding operational issues. She has visited all teams within the Organisation. She has also attended 'Townhall' events which are on a bi-monthly basis with input from the Senior Team, making them more accessible to staff.

The Chief Executive and Sean Holland, Chief Social Work Officer, marked World Social Work day by hosting a lunchtime seminar. There were many interesting and varied questions but the discussion reinforced the importance of social workers working in Probation.

Among the main issues currently facing the Organization are: the impact of staff testing positive for Covid; the Culture of the organisation with work ongoing in relation to this; workload and pay modernisation with the pay differential between Trusts and PBNI being the single biggest issue with staff.

Engagement continues with stakeholders, Criminal Justice partners, the Voluntary Sector, Health and the Prison Service. The Chief Executive attended the Prison Board meeting recently and she also met with the Lady Chief Justice who remains supportive of Probation. Mark Wilson, Director of Probation Service, Ireland continues to be a key point of contact for professional advice. The joint Public Protection Advisory Group (PPAG) will be meeting next week. The PPAG works across both jurisdictions.

The Chief Executive along with Ronnie Armour, Director General of NIPS, attended the Butler Trust awards which provided an opportunity to engage with other jurisdictions and discuss different initiatives. She also attended the 'Five Nations' call (England, Scotland, Wales, N Ireland and Ireland) it was evident that all jurisdictions have staffing issues.

The Chief Executive and A/Director of Operations are engaging with the Universities to raise the profile of Probation and to promote Probation to newly qualified social workers.

The key issue remains pay differentials and the Chief Executive wished to place on record her thanks to Mr King and Mrs Sweeney for their work to ensure that the outstanding pay remit was approved before the rise in National Insurance contributions.

Members were informed that there had been no communication on the budget this week.

A Governance & Accountability session had been run for the Senior Leadership Team during their development day. This was facilitated by Stephen Mungavin who led discussion on Risk Management with a view to improving the Corporate Objectives and to ensure the key risks were identified. This is the last year of the current Corporate Plan and the revised risks will be ready for the new Plan. The internal Performance and Practice Review Unit (PPRU) are carrying out audits and inspections to ensure the recommendations of the CJINI inspection continue to be met.

The Board noted the update.

## **7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 29/22)**

There were four items of correspondence to note.

7.1 Letter to the Minister of Justice on Social Worker Supply 11 February 2022

7.2 Response from the Minister of Justice on Social Worker Supply

7.3 Letter to Chair of the Justice Committee from the Minister of Health on recruiting and retaining Social Workers

#### 7.4 Letter from the Chief Social Work Officer/ Deputy Secretary to the CEO on the Social Work Implementation Board 2022 -2025 with Terms of Reference

The Chief Executive provided members with background into the correspondence and issues around recruitment and retention of social work staff. Mervyn Storey MLA, Chair of the Justice Committee, had written to Minister Swann about the shortage of qualified social workers. A review, the Social Work Workforce Implementation Board has been set up and with Mr Holland extending an invitation to Probation. Ministers Long and Swann met last week to discuss the issue and Minister Long expressed her full support for qualified social workers in Justice. Members were advised that Health, Justice and Education are all experiencing shortages of qualified social workers. The Department of Health provides higher salaries than Justice and Education. It was explained to members that the issue is not recruiting staff but retaining staff due to higher salaries outside of Justice. There was discussion on providing practice learning opportunities for students and other ways to increase interest in Probation as a viable career option. There is a need for PBNI to train more practice supervisors who are responsible for assessing students practice; there is a cost both financial and in time. This year there are five student placements and if resources permit, it is hoped to increase this next year. PBNI are training two new practice supervisors this business year and will be seeking more practice supervisors training places for the next business year. There is high demand for places and PBNI are allocated a number of places.

The Chief Social Worker Officer has established a social work workforce, Implementation Board and Probation will be represented on this.

A member suggested that with the increase in the Health budget there was more opportunities for qualified social workers and therefore pay is a key issue to be resolved.

The Board noted the correspondence.

### 8. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER UPDATE (PAPER 30/21)

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

The Head of Finance & Estates advised that the key highlights will be covered under agenda item 11.1. The Budget position for 2022 – 2025 has not been confirmed. It is looking like a flat cash budget which would have shortfalls of £1.1m in year one to £1.8m in year three. The shortfall in budget does not cover the £1.3m required for pay modernisation. A flat cash budget for 2022-2023 will result in the inability to plan and to provide funding to VCS.

The Probation Estate has 21 sites and the Estates department continues to look for suitable premises in Enniskillen. Probation is embracing hybrid working within its plans for premises.

The Head of Finance & Estates provided an update on legal cases as noted in the paper.

The Deputy Head of HR provided an update on HR and highlighted the key points. She reaffirmed that there is a need for pay modernisation to stem the flow of leavers. The Hybrid working policy is out for consultation. It was noted that hybrid working does not suit all roles. The Deputy Head of HR took members through the 22 step pay grade, advising that the grade scales did not allow for a senior practitioner grade at present but is something PBNI are keen to introduce.

The A/Director of Operations advised members that three risks had been added to the Strategic Risk Register (SRR) giving a total of seven risks. She took members through each risk as laid out in the paper. The quarter 1 SRR 2022-2023 will be presented to the ARAC at its next meeting.

Members were asked to note the ICT update in the paper and there were no question asked by members.

The A/Director of Rehabilitation advised members that assurance had been given to the Board on work completed to inform the Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) review of Reducing Reoffending amongst Adults.

PBNI continues to operate within Phase 3 of the Covid Recovery Plan and continues to respond to the NI Executive guidelines. The Organisation is moving forward to a hybrid working plan. The A/Director of Rehabilitation also provided an update on Problem Solving Justice, Mental Health and Domestic Homicide Reviews, Women service users and the PPAG. In response to a question on the impact on 'young offenders' of suspending visits to Hydebank Wood College, it was advised that remote visits had worked well but face to face contact had returned and reinforcing the importance of family relations.

The A/Director of Operations provided an update on the Operations Directorate. Members were provided with information on the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (NI); Public Protection Arrangements in N Ireland; Practice Standards; Service User involvement and an explanation of what is a serious further offence.

There were no Serious Further Offences to report in this period.

The Head of Communications provided details of internal and external communications, highlighting a number of events. Communications is working to a three year strategy. Internal communications continues to be a focus with the Townhall events being well attended. There has been extensive external communications as detailed in the presented paper.

Members were advised of six low risk data incidents from January to date. Members were assured that staff continue to be supported with information and guidance to prevent data incidents

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Secretary advised members that they will be issued with secure tablets at the Board Induction day on 8 April 2022. Only Probation email addresses will be used to send emails to members once the tablets have been distributed.

### **9.1 Schedule of meetings 2022 – 2023 (Paper 31/22)**

Members were asked to review the meeting dates for Committees and Board. There were no queries from members so the paper was agreed.

### **9.2 Board Work Plan 2022/23 (Paper 32/22)**

The Board Secretary advised that the work plan covered the financial year 2022-2023 and provided information on the work of Committees and Board. The Work Plan ensures that the Committees and Board have forward notice of their work going forward.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair, as a previous committee member, provided members with a summary of the work of the ARAC. The ARAC has a responsibility for ensuring PBNI fully complies with the financial and other instructions from Government. ARAC is about compliance and will consider all audit reports and lessons learnt. Risk Management is an important area of work for the Committee with the Strategic Risk Register being brought quarterly for Board approval. The Committee is also advised of any fraud or losses which have been suspected or carried out.

The Board noted the update.

### **10.1 Minutes from the ARAC meeting on 11 February 2022 (Paper 33/22)**

The approved minutes from the meeting held on 11 February 2022 were included in the papers for members' information.

The Board noted the approved minutes

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

Mr Donaghy, as a previous committee member, provided members with a summary of the work of CRC. Reviewing the appropriate risks that come under this committee's oversight. Important areas to understand are budget planning, estates and business cases. HR and the people strategy are key issues for the Committee. The four areas of risks are: reduction of budget; pay modernisation; budget uncertainty and increasing caseload for probation officers.

The Board noted the update.

### **11.1 Financial Outturn Report – February 2022 (Paper 34/22)**

The Head of Finance and Estates took members through the financial year to date underspends and provided context and the reasons for the underspend in resource, Problem Solving Justice and delays in maintenance projects. The Resource DEL annual forecast was highlighted together with the Capital DEL. The sale of Crawford Square, which completed on 18 March, has brought in additional capital income of £150k. Prompt Payment Performance is below target as staff absences remains an issue.

The Board noted the paper.

### **11.2 Minutes from the CRC meeting on 28 January 2022 (Paper 35/22)**

The approved minutes from the meeting held on 28 January 2022 were included in the papers for members' information.

The Board noted the minutes

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

Dr Byrne, as a previous committee member, provided members with a summary of the work of PPC. The Committee reviews data over the four quarters of the year and looks at issues that affect practice and work. Younger service users and women service users are key areas of

interest for the Committee. The Committee oversees Board Seminars which are held to promote Probation and to look at policy in the operational aspects. Preparation is ongoing for the next seminar.

The Board noted the update.

**12.1 Draft Business Plan for 2022 – 2023 (Paper 36/22)**

The A/Director of Rehabilitation advised that the draft business plan for 2022 – 2023 is being brought to the Board for approval as, due to the new tenure of the Board, there has not been a PPC meeting to review the Plan and make recommendations. This is the third and final year of the current Corporate Plan. The Draft Business Plan has 6 strategic priorities. Following discussion by the Board Members it was agreed to approve the Business Plan 2022 – 2023.

The Board approved the Draft Business Plan 2022 – 2023.

**12.2 PPC Draft Minutes (Paper 37/22)**

The approved minutes from the meeting held on 18 February 2022 were included in the papers for members' information.

The Board noted the minutes

**13. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business discussed or reported

The meeting ended at 1.20 pm.

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Mr Max Murray CBE  
Board Chair

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Date