

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 26 JANUARY 2024

9.30 am – Conference Room, PBNI HQ

ATTENDANCE

BOARD MEMBERS

Mr M Murray, Chair
Ms E Patterson, Deputy Chair
Mr J Johnston
Ms A Lloyd-Stevens
Mrs C Magee
Mr K Donaghy
Mr B Ingram
Ms M Brunt (by Teams)
Mr J Byrne (From 10.30am)
Ms B Mongan (Items 1 - 9)
Mr N Bodger (by Teams, Items 1 – 15.1)

OFFICIALS

Mrs A Stewart, Chief Executive
Ms G Montgomery, Director of Operations
Mr S Hamilton, Director of Operations
Mrs C Sweeney, Head of HR and L&OD
Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications
Mr P King, Head of Finance and Estates
Ms J Fitzsimons, Board Secretary
Miss N Brownlee, Executive Support Officer

GUESTS

Donal Collins, Equality Commission NI
Jeff McGuinness, Deputy Director, DoJ

Presentation from the Equality Commission NI

The Board Chair welcomed Mr Collins, Equality Commission NI to the meeting. Mrs Sweeney introduced the presentation and explained that Mr Collins was attending to provide an overview to Board Members of equality obligations and responsibilities as a public authority service provider and employer. Mr Collins thanked the Board Chair for the invitation and welcomed the opportunity to talk to members about the work of ECNI. He explained the role of ECNI and provided an overview of Section 75 obligations including the process, screening and Quality Impact Assessment. A useful discussion with Members followed which included clarity on the specific role of the Board in this area of work. The Board Chair concluded by thanking Mr Collins for attending and providing a very useful session on equality obligations.

1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and set out the schedule for the day. There were no conflicts of interest and a quorum was confirmed.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies recorded.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 15 DECEMBER 2023 (PAPER)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 15 December 2023 were approved as a true record, subject to an amendment on page 4 'Policy and Practice Committee, Committee Chair's Update'.

The minutes were approved by the Board.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER)

There were 8 actions from the previous meeting which have all been completed.

The Board noted the paper.

5. BOARD CHAIR'S REPORT (PAPER)

The Board Chair discussed the recent visit to Probation's Newry office and highlighted staff's concerns around ECO, Programmes and Pay Modernisation. Mr Hamilton stated that SLT communicated the financial rationale behind the reductions in ECO and Programmes throughout and staff's frustrations were shared by managers and leadership. Assurance was given that the revised ECO model will be subject to review. The Chief Executive advised that Pay Modernisation as well as other issues around culture in the organisation would be discussed at the next Town Hall event and would be reflected in the Business Plan for next year.

The Board noted the paper.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE (PAPER)

Members noted the report from the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive advised members that following feedback from the Business Planning meeting with managers on 24 January 2024, a draft Business Plan for 2024-25 will be brought to a future Board meeting for input and approval.

The Board noted the paper.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

7.1. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN BOARD CHAIR AND MARK GOODFELLOW ON URGENT MEETING WITH PERMANENT SECRETARY

The Board Chair asked members to note the email exchange with Mark Goodfellow requesting a meeting with the Permanent Secretary.

The Board noted the update.

BOARD BUSINESS

8. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT (PAPER)

Mr King will provide updates to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee after meeting with PBNI's external auditors regarding year end preparations. A summary will also be given to the Board. Mr King advised that work has begun to exit PBNI's Alderwood site with staff being relocated to Headquarters and Lisburn. This move should not have any operational impacts on the organisation and aims to be completed by 31 March 2024. The CSO will provide an update by 31 March on one outstanding legal issue where PBNI may be liable to cover 50% of a claimant's legal costs. An estimated figure has already been budgeted for. Board members were given assurance that any learning from this case has been taken forward.

Mrs Sweeney gave an overview of staffing numbers highlighting the overall decline in head count and full-time employees, some of which were brought about by budget constraints. Despite this, staffing levels remain safe. Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Other Psychiatric Illnesses remains the most common reason for staff absences which is continuing to be explored through health and wellbeing initiatives. In Quarter 3 there were 60 training events organised by Learning and Development with over 400 staff members participating. The Onboarding Induction programme commenced on 9 January 2024 with input from a service user and a registered victim. The Disability Passport is currently being looked at by SLT and union representatives before a full consultation roll out in February.

Ms Montgomery brought members' attention to the two Serious Further Offences cases noting there were no deviations from standards in either case. Mr Hamilton advised that Service Level Agreements with the prison service have been signed off for 2023/24 which will change the working model in the prison and prison teams. Mr Hamilton will update the Board on any significant changes this will include impacts on the PDU review taking place currently.

Ms McGreevy advised members of the increase in complaints since April 2023 with the highest number of complaints from service users in the prisons. Addressing members questions Ms McGreevy stated most complaints related to risk assessments and recommendations reference release from custody. The recent audit of Complaints Handling will be brought to the Audit and

Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) for information. PBNI is waiting on feedback from the Data Protection Audit – the results of which will also be brought to the ARAC meeting. Board members congratulated the Communications team for the high standard of Probation News and social media outputs.

The Board noted the paper.

9. PAY MODERNISATION (VERBAL)

Mrs Sweeney shared that trade union representatives are keen to meet with SLT to be updated on Pay Modernisation. However DoF need to respond to the latest business case and may have further questions around affordability. If the Pay Modernisation case progresses, trade unions will need to consult with their members on the new proposals which should allow SLT time to complete the necessary administrative work leading to implementation. PBNI will ensure every effort is made to mobilise as quickly as possible if the Pay Modernisation case is approved. Ms McGreevey will email all staff with an update regarding the current Pay Modernisation position. It was agreed that the Chief Executive will bring a paper to the next Board meeting setting out the next steps for Pay Modernisation with time scales for members.

Action: Chief Executive to bring a paper to the next Board meeting setting out the next steps for Pay Modernisation with time scales.

DISCUSSION WITH MR MCGUINNESS – DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Mr McGuinness joined the meeting at 11am and gave apologies on behalf of Richard Pengelly and Mark Goodfellow. The Board Chair thanked Mr McGuinness for joining the Board meeting and asked for an update on the current position of the Budget and Pay Modernisation Business Case. Mr McGuinness expressed sincere thanks on behalf of the DoJ to PBNI for working alongside them through a challenging year. Mr McGuinness apologised for the length of time the Pay Modernisation case has taken to progress and that the DoJ was glad positive feedback had been received from Mr Pengelly, Permanent Secretary, DoJ . Mr McGuinness was hopeful that PBNI's diligence with the Business Case would be reflected in how the case moves forward with DoF. Mr McGuinness shared that the average response time from the DoF was around 4 weeks. The Board Chair noted the impact that delays in the process had on staff with Mr McGuinness advising that the DoJ have lessons to learn going forward.

Looking at the wider political situation, Mr McGuinness shared that the DoJ continue to prepare for the return of an Executive however there is continued uncertainty around this. The lack of an Executive may delay details of the 2024/25 budget being released.

Mr McGuinness encouraged PBNI to continue to engage with the Department. The Board Chair thanked Mr McGuinness for the update and communication.

The Board noted the update.

10. PBNI POLICY PRIORITIES (PAPER)

The Chief Executive asked Board members for their views on PBNI's draft Policy Priorities for 2024/25 which would inform PBNI's engagement with an incoming Minister and on a future programme for government. These are internal conversations to be had at present until there is an opportunity to engage with a new minister. The Board members agreed with the points outlined in the paper and encouraged the Senior Leadership Team to look for examples of good practice outside of Northern Ireland.

The Board noted the paper.

11. 2024 – 2028 CVS FUNDING DECISIONS (PAPER)

Mr Hamilton asked Board members to consider the outlined CVS funding proposals for the coming year. Members agreed with the retendering process of the 6 key areas with a total allocation of £500,000. Board members asked Mr Hamilton to ensure employability and skills-based programmes for service users would continue despite budget pressures. Mr Hamilton advised that Assistant Director Melissa Spence is reviewing the current employability programme and will provide feedback on this to the Policy and Practice Committee in the coming months.

The Board approved the paper.

12. COMMUNICATIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE (PAPER)

Ms McGreevy updated members on the messaging to be used around the impact of budget cuts, as agreed by the Communications Task and Finish Group. It was agreed to wait until the budget is finalised before the potential impacts were discussed publicly. The Chief Executive will meet with the Lady Chief Justice and the Chief Constable once the budget is confirmed to discuss the

possible implications of decisions needed to live within budget and likely concerns around risk to public safety.

The Board approved the paper.

13. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS

13.1. DRAFT MEETINGS SCHEDULE 2024/25 (PAPER)

The Board Secretary confirmed that the required number of committee meetings have been scheduled for 2024/25 with no meetings arranged for July and August to allow for members' holiday leave. The CCWG meeting dates have yet to be confirmed.

The Board approved the paper.

13.2. BOARD WORK PLAN 2023/24 (PAPER)

The Board noted the 2023/24 Work Plan. The Board Secretary will bring the 2024/25 Work Plan to a future Board meeting for noting.

The Board noted the paper.

AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

14. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Committee Chair advised that there would be updates given at the next Board meeting following the ARAC meeting on 2 February 2024.

The Board noted the update.

CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Committee Chair advised that the Corporate Resources Committee members would be meeting on 1 February 2024 for a Sick Absence Review workshop. This is an important meeting to discuss the issue of staff workload, work related stress and sick absences. Feedback from this meeting will be provided at the next Board meeting. All Board members are welcome to attend.

The Board noted the update.

15.1. PBNI LEAVERS – CAPTURING VIEWS (PAPER)

Mrs Sweeney advised that as with many organisations, only a small percentage of PBNI staff who leave will complete exit questionnaires. Therefore PBNI is looking to implement a two-stepped approach of asking line managers to capture key information from their staff and provide all leavers with an opportunity to complete an exit questionnaire. PBNI will seek to identify opportunities to capture information through any available means. Board members agreed that exit interviews and questionnaires can help to identify and address any issues in the workplace.

The Board noted the paper.

15.2. FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT – DECEMBER 2023 (PAPER)

Mr King asked members to note the small underspend of £50,000 which is related to the continued turnover of staff. This will continue to be monitored and has been flagged but not yet surrendered to the DoF. Mr King advised that there will be a clearer picture to update members next month but that any capital underspend cannot be held on to.

The Board noted the paper.

15.3. DOF BUDGET SCENARIO PLANNING RETURN 2024-25 (PAPER)

Mr King provided details of the return provided to DoJ as part of the DoF information scenario planning exercise for information.

The Board noted the paper.

POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE

16. Committee Chair's Update (Verbal)

16.1. Board Themed Meeting – 'Our Partnerships' (Verbal)

The Committee Chair advised members that representatives from the PSNI and Judiciary would be in attendance at the Board Themed meeting focusing on Strategic Priority 'Our Partnerships' on 14 March 2024 in Ulster University. The Committee Chair has offered to facilitate a tour of the university from 1.30pm. The Committee Chair will send through details to the Board Secretary including if online attendance can be facilitated. This will replace the March Board meeting and only essential Board business will be conducted. A briefing paper will be circulated for members prior to the meeting for information.

The Board Chair asked members to think about future Board Themed days with a focus on championing the organisation and increasing the visibility of the Board.

The Board noted the update.

OTHER BUSINESS

17. Any Other Business

There were no other business items.

The Board Chair thanked members and officials for attending. The next Board meeting will be on Friday 23 February 2024, PBNI Conference Room, 4th Floor Headquarters at 9.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.50pm.

Mr Max Murray CBE
Board Chair

Date