

**PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 23 AUGUST 2024**

**9.30 am – Conference Room, PBNI Headquarters**

**ATTENDANCE**

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Mr M Murray, Chair  
Ms E Patterson, Deputy Chair  
Ms M Brunt  
Mr K Donaghy  
Mr J Johnston  
Ms C Magee  
Ms B Mongan

**OFFICIALS**

Mrs A Stewart, Chief Executive  
Mr S Hamilton, Director of Operations  
Mr P King, Head of Finance & Estates  
Mrs C Sweeney, Head of HR and L&OD  
Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications  
Ms J Fitzsimons, Board Secretary  
Mrs A Abraham, Business Support Manager (minutes)  
Ms F Quail, Information and Governance Officer (item 13)

**1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and set out the schedule for the day. A quorum was confirmed. Ms Brunt declared a conflict of interest in respect of agenda item 11 and agreed to leave the meeting when item was being discussed.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were recorded from Mr Ingram, Ms Lloyd-Stevens and Ms Montgomery.

**3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 21 JUNE 2024 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 21 June 2024 were approved as a true record. For accuracy, agenda item 14, page 6 is to be amended removing Acting.

The Board approved the paper.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER)**

There were no actions from the previous meeting.

**5. BOARD CHAIR'S REPORT (PAPER)**

The Board Chair referred Members to the paper and highlighted the main points of his catch-up meeting with NAPO, the ISU team meeting with Members and the meeting with NIACRO which he attended with the Deputy Chair and the Chief Executive. The Board Chair also attended a meeting with the Justice Minister and a Board Member who had recently been removed from office.

The Board Chair reminded Members of the Memorial Service for Mr Bodger on 26 September 2024. Those wishing to attend should confirm through the Board Secretariat mailbox.

The Board noted the paper

The Chair acknowledged the work undertaken by staff in implementing the new pay framework following the approval of the Pay Modernisation Business Case, in particular Mrs Sweeney, Mr King and Mrs Paula Smyth. He then explained that a new contract of employment has been developed based on the new Pay Agreement. The most significant change is that the notice period for new staff at Probation Officer level and above will increase from 4 weeks to 12 weeks. This change was approved through

online correspondence by Members of the Remuneration Committee who recommended the Board approve the change.

Following a briefing from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development the Board approved the amendments to notice periods in the new contract of employment for new staff.

## **6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE (VERBAL)**

The Chief Executive explained that most of her update was detailed in the Management Information Report, agenda item 8. She provided a brief summary on the Causeway On-boarding process. This is a significant piece of work for PBNI and therefore a Project Board had been established, with Mrs Stewart as Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) and the DoJ Head of IT as Chair. The first meeting of the Project Board took place in June 2024 involving a range of staff across the justice system. Three of the four workshops planned have already taken place. The final workshop on how PBNI receives information and messages from Causeway to its electronic case management system (ECMS) is being held on 29 August 2024. A briefing including information videos will then be issued by PBNI's Head of IT to all staff. Mrs Stewart confirmed regular updates would be provided through the Corporate Resources Committee.

The Board noted the Update.

## **7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER)**

There were three items of correspondence to note.

### **7.1 Correspondence from Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (DoJ), to Chief Executive – Governance and Accountability Issues**

The Chief Executive referred Members to the correspondence and the request from the DoJ Permanent Secretary, Hugh Widdis to ensure that relevant staff and Board members, as appropriate are aware of the issues within the correspondence. The issues relate to progress in developing Partnership Agreements, ALB Reviews, Public Audit Processes and Conflicts of Interest and the Chief Executive gave an update to the Board on the PBNI status in relation to each of the issues. Members noted that the Partnership Agreement was at an advanced stage. The Conflicts of Interest Policy and Procedure was currently scheduled for review in November 2024 and would be brought to the Policy & Practice Committee (PPC) and the Board.

### **7.2 Correspondence from Chief Executive to/from Justice Minister - Approval of the PBNI Business Plan 2024-25**

The Chief Executive asked Members to note the confirmation of the approval of the PBNI Business Plan 2024-25 on 9 August 2024.

### **7.3 Correspondence from Director of Operations to Lady Chief Justice – Timescales for Pre-Sentence Reports in the Crown Court**

The Chief Executive asked Mr Hamilton, on behalf of Ms Montgomery, to take Members through the background and reasons for PBNI's formal request seeking (on a permanent basis) a six-week adjournment period in all Crown Court cases for the preparation of pre-sentence reports, with the exception of reports on sexual offences, serious domestic abuse, murder and manslaughter for which an eight-week adjournment is requested. The purpose is two-fold: to provide consistency across all Crown Courts; and to minimise the need for adjournment requests by PBNI (and corresponding negative impact on victims as well as valuable Court time).

Mr Hamilton explained that an audit of explanatory letters submitted to Court in 2024 had taken place to examine the reasons for submission and a further audit is planned for quarter 4 of 2024-25. In addition, there will be on-going liaison with The Recorder, Her Honour Judge Smyth and The Recorder, His Honour Judge Rafferty, which will provide an additional level of ongoing discussion with the judiciary as and when issues arise. It is hoped that the proposal will be approved by the Criminal Justice Board in November 2024.

The Board commended the detail provided to the Lady Chief Justice and noted senior management's commitment to monitor and provide assurance to the Board.

The Board noted the correspondence.

A discussion on the shortage of social workers across the public sector followed and it was agreed that Ms Montgomery would provide an update on progress of the Social Work Workforce Implementation Board (SWWIB) for the next Board meeting.

**Action: Ms Montgomery to provide an update on progress of the Social Work Workforce Implementation Board for the September Board meeting.**

## **BOARD BUSINESS**

### **8. Q1 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT AND BUSINESS PLAN PERFORMANCE (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive advised Members that the Management Information Report Q1 was a first attempt at reporting performance data and management information per quarter in a new format and that some refinement was still required to remove duplication, sync data within each quarter and consider changing the name of the report. A Chief Executive's monthly update would still be provided.

Overall, Members were complimentary and endorsed the new format of the Management Information Quarterly Report and noted its alignment to PBNI's Strategic Priorities.

#### **Chief Executive's Report**

The Chief Executive informed Members that a series of engagement meetings with teams had taken place over the summer. These included visits to Community Service projects and she extended an invitation to Members who wished to attend future Community Service visits.

The second meeting of the Staff Engagement Forum (SEF) had taken place on 10 July 2024 in Dungannon and feedback had been provided to all staff with video blogs from participants posted on the intranet. The SEF had agreed Terms of Reference and to meet at least 3 times per year with membership open to all staff. The Chief Executive reported very positively on the meetings of the SEF to date. was a very positive meeting. After discussion it was agreed to review the staff Code of Conduct.

A Town Hall meeting was held on 18 July 2024 where discussion took place on the work being done to develop PBNI's approach to being Trauma Informed. The mentimeter survey is open to all staff to complete until 31 August 2024.

The Chief Executive advised that there had been no update from the DoJ regarding any Transformation Fund bids. It was noted that the Prison Population Oversight Group had been stood down after the bids had been submitted. If PBNI's bid in respect of Enhanced Combination Orders (ECO) roll out is not successful, further discussion with the DoJ will be required on how to make progress in extending ECO's to other court areas.

The Chief Executive had met with Angela Constance, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs in Scotland on her recent visit to Northern Ireland. Ms Constance had expressed interest in the ECO pilot and in particular how PBNI had engaged and received the support from the judiciary.

The Chief Executive had met with the senior leads for the Five Nations of Probation for a briefing on the development of SDS40 policy which is being implemented across prison and probation to tackle the ongoing overcrowding crisis in prisons. The appointment of James Timpson OBE, a long-standing advocate of probation, as Minister of State (Minister for Prisons, Parole and Probation) in the Ministry of Justice in the first week of the 2024 Labour government was noted. The next meeting of the Five Nations of Probation in October 2024 is an in-person meeting and will be a key meeting to review the learning from implementation of SDS40.

### **Finance and Estates Update**

Mr King confirmed that, following June monitoring, the PBNI budget 2024-25 is £24.2m and now includes Fresh Start funding for the Aspire and Engage programmes (£1,732k) and an additional allocation of £200k. In total PBNI had received £498k to help fund pressures in year and the NI Prison Service had secured an additional £157k that PBNI can utilise to provide a further six staff across prison-based teams. The revised allocation leaves PBNI with a small residual pressure of £156k which includes the current NJC pay increase for 2024-25. Mr King advised that the DoF had just instigated a budget pressures exercise for 2025-26 and it is likely that a request for a three-year forecast will follow.

### **Our Performance**

Mr Hamilton updated Members on the Q1 Business Plan Performance as detailed in the paper. It was noted that this was the first in-year report to the Board of progress against the PBNI Business Plan 2024-25. Nineteen of the twenty-two actions were in progress and three had not progressed as yet at the end of quarter 1. A number of surveys had taken place in Q1 including a Service User survey and a Sentencer survey. The findings of both will be considered at the next meeting of the Policy and Practice Committee. In Q2 the Strategic Management Board (SMB) will be reviewing Public Protection arrangements including the co-located Public Protection Team at Seapark. A paper on the outcome of this review will be brought to a future Policy and Practice Committee. It was recommended that updates on Causeway On-boarding and the monitoring of explanatory letters to court should be included as part of reporting performance.

Following discussion the Board approved the Q1 Business Plan Performance 2024-25.

### **Our People**

Members commended the approach and work so far on the development of PBNI culture, through staff engagement. The Chief Executive discussed with the Board the Staff Survey Action Plan which had been formulated following feedback from the staff engagement survey.

**Action: An update on the Staff Survey Action Plan is to be brought to a future Board meeting.**

### **Our Services**

Mr Hamilton provided a summary of this section of the paper and highlighted four key areas.

Victims - There had been a significant increase in Q1 2024-25 against Q4 2023-24 in the number of victim registrations with PBNI's Victim Information Scheme mainly due to staff absence in Q4.

Serious Further Offences (SFOs) – The number of SFOs in Q1 had increased from previous quarters. By way of explanation, this was due to offences of Non-Fatal Strangulation now being included in the SFO reporting criteria. Further work is required on the grading of such cases to ensure that only appropriate cases are managed and reported as SFOs. A request for an independent Serious Case Review (SCR) has been made in respect of one SFO. None of the SFOs reported were cases where deviating from Practice Standards was applicable.

PBNI's work in Prisons – The Northern Ireland Prison Service had been successful in a bid for an additional £155k for PBNI in 2024-25, which will fund an additional six Probation Officers in PBNI prison teams. This has boosted morale within the prison based teams and the support of the Board is much appreciated.

Offending Behaviour Programmes/ECOs – Mr Hamilton was pleased to report that due to the increased 2024-25 budget, PBNI will be able to resume programme delivery to some moderate risk offenders (in addition to the high-risk perpetrators) in Q2. PBNI is still awaiting the outcome of the Transformation Fund bid in respect of ECOs.

### **Our Budget**

Members were referred to the work on Estates, as detailed in the paper.

### **Our Partnership**

Members were referred to Partnership work, as detailed in the paper.

### **HR and Organisational Development Update**

Mrs Sweeney updated Members on the key highlights including the recent Probation Officer appointments and a proposed further recruitment campaign. The next Onboarding Programme (induction) for new staff is planned to commence on 23 September 2024. The twelve-day programme includes two days for new Corporate staff. There will be a focus on domestic abuse within the report writing session, a new session on court etiquette and a visit to Ballymena court, meeting Judge Broderick.

Members were asked to note the Wellbeing Programme 2024-25 compiled with the assistance of the Wellbeing Working Group and approval of the Senior Leadership Team.

In response to a query that there were procedures to support staff who had been under threat by service users, the Chief Executive confirmed that appropriate arrangements were in place. The Board Chair requested that Members attending visits to teams, be informed of any staff impacted.

### **Communications and Engagement Update**

Ms McGreevy referred to the work that had taken place since the launch of PBNI's short film to raise awareness of and confidence in community sentencing. There had been significant social media engagement and media coverage in Belfast Live and the Irish News. Extremely positive feedback had been received from stakeholders in HMPPS, the Probation Service Ireland, academics and partners. A fifty-minute, in depth look at probation had taken place on BBC Talkback which featured Mr Hamilton, Director of Operations, Robyn McVeigh, a Probation Officer and a service user. This had been well received.

Internal communications in Q1 focussed on pay modernisation and this had been praised and welcomed by staff.

### **Compliance Update**

Ms McGreevy referred to the significant work required to respond to subject access requests, data incidents, develop data sharing agreements and undertake data protection impact assessments to enable operational staff to share information with partners. Fourteen complaints were reported in Q1 2024-25 in comparison to nine in Q1 2023-24.

For awareness, Ms McGreevy advised of the likelihood of media attention in respect of a SFO case coming to court on 6 September 2024.

The Board noted the Paper.

## **9. CJINI PROBATION PRACTICE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW INSPECTION REPORT (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the CJINI Probation Practice Follow Up Review Inspection Report had been published on Wednesday 14 August 2024. The report showed that PBNI had demonstrated that it continues to be a learning organisation with leaders and staff focussed on and striving to deliver high quality work and manage and support service users effectively to address the risk of harm to the public. Out of the five strategic recommendations, one had been achieved and four partially achieved. Jacqui

Durkin, CJINI Chief Inspector and Mrs Stewart had made a joint podcast in respect of the findings and conclusions of the follow up review. This will be posted in the next few days. Members raised a number of points but overall welcomed the outcome of the follow up review and expressed thanks to the Chief Executive and the Senior Leadership Team for their commitment.

It is anticipated that a future CJINI inspection may focus on the risk of harm and therefore preparatory work will be required in advance.

The Board noted the paper.

## **10. PBNI ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive explained that the purpose of the paper was to outline the current position in relation to the key issues impacting organisational resilience and actions ongoing or planned by the senior leadership team to mitigate the impact in the short to medium term.

Mrs Stewart outlined the challenges in managing attendance. Firstly, there is a higher-than-normal proportion of Area Managers off sick resulting in additional work for their colleagues managing other teams combined with the pressures of supporting new and inexperienced staff. Additionally, Area Managers must oversee casework and staff wellbeing alongside formal monitoring of practice. Furthermore, there are currently high levels of sickness amongst operational administrative posts including Business Support Managers. This is having a direct impact on Area Managers and front-line staff.

Discussion took place around current and proposed actions to support organisational resilience. Employment offers to 17 Probation Officers from the recent recruitment exercise had been made and a campaign to recruit a further nine posts is planned. The model of supporting the 17+ AYE, new and inexperienced staff is being reviewed. Some deviations had been agreed with Assistant Directors, for example a reduction in monitoring over the summer or permission to attend less meetings. Deviations from Practice Standards, approved by Senior Management, continue to be of assistance to teams with high levels of absence. As discussed earlier in the meeting, a request had been made to the Lady Chief Justice regarding an extension to the timescales for pre-sentence reports. PBNI is currently scoping out a new role/grade at a "Senior Practitioner" level to support Area Managers in practice development within their teams. Work on a business case and tender specification to develop a bespoke leadership training programme is underway. Further to feedback at the Quarterly Area Managers meeting in July, a task and finish group has been established to look at the key challenges and what could be done in the short and medium/longer term to address them. Area Managers have requested a review of their role with a focus on manager to staff ratios and geographical location of teams.

The Chief Executive welcomed Members' early views on the key issues and proposed actions outlined in the paper. Once Pay Modernisation has been implemented, it is hoped for a period of stability. It was agreed to review progress in early 2025, before commencing an Area Manager Role Review.

**Action: A further update on organisational resilience to be brought to a forthcoming Corporate Resources Committee / Board.**

## **11. DRAFT ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR EQUALITY COMMISSION NI 2023/24 (PAPER)**

Mrs Sweeney gave a summary of the draft Annual Progress Report for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland – April 2023 to March 2024, using the template that had been provided by the Equality Commission. She outlined the work that had taken place since the last report. Members were supportive of the development of the Equality and Good Relations Action Plan and the Disability Action Plan. Some minor changes to the report were suggested by Members. Members gave delegated authority to the Chair to sign off the final report prior to submission to the Equality Commission by 31 August 2024.

**Action: Mrs Sweeney to forward a copy of the final Annual Progress report to the Board Chair for approval on behalf of the Board, prior to submission to the Equality Commission.**

The Board approved the paper.

## **12. PAY MODERNISATION UPDATE (VERBAL)**

Discussion had taken place at agenda item 5.

## **13. DRAFT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive had asked Fiona Quail, PBNI Information and Governance Offer, to review the Partnership Agreement between the Department of Justice and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and to suggest any amendments.

Ms Quail outlined the proposed changes to be made to the document and members highlighted a number of issues/concerns during discussion. The Board will be updated of any significant amendments or developments.

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

### **14.1 Board Work Plan 2024-25 (Paper)**

The Board Secretary referred to the paper, highlighting the Board Themed meeting in November, the planned visits to Burren House in September and the Armagh office in October and asked Members to note the proposed guest presentations at future meetings.

The Board noted the Paper.

## **AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)**

### **15. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)**

The Committee Chair had no update from the previous Board meeting.

## **CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE (CRC)**

### **16. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)**

The Committee Chair had no update from the previous Board meeting.

#### **16.1 Financial Outturn Report – July 2024 (PAPER)**

Mr King referred Members to the paper and confirmed that the underspend in the Capital budget of £1,980k had been returned to the Department. The Board were advised that planned capital work in North Street would not progress as planned

The Board noted the paper.

## **POLICY & PRACTICE COMMITTEE (PPC)**

## **17. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)**

The Committee Chair had no update from the previous Board meeting.

### **17.1 Board Themed Meeting on Trauma Update (Verbal)**

The Committee Chair informed Members that discussion and planning had taken place around the Board Themed Meeting to be held on 22 November 2024. A further planning meeting to agree key speakers and content will be held on Friday 6 September 2024. It was noted that the results of a culture and organisational staff survey should be available for consideration at the themed meeting.

**Action: Board Secretary to book an external venue for the Board Themed Meeting in November.**

The Board noted the update.

## **18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business. The meeting ended at 12.50 pm.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING – FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2024, 9.30 AM - PBNI HQ CONFERENCE ROOM**

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**Mr Max Murray CBE**  
**Board Chair**

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**Date**