

## **PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER 2024**

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

#### **ATTENDANCE**

##### **BOARD MEMBERS**

Mr M Murray, Chair  
Ms E Patterson, Deputy Chair  
Ms M Brunt (Via MS Teams)  
Mr K Donaghy  
Mr B Ingram  
Mr J Johnston  
Ms A Lloyd-Stevens  
Ms C Magee  
Ms B Mongan

##### **OFFICIALS**

Ms A Stewart, Chief Executive  
Mr S Hamilton, Director of Operations  
Ms G Montgomery, Director of Operations  
Mr P King, Head of Finance & Estates  
Ms 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)

#### **PRESENTATION FROM BEVERLEY WALL, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE**

The Board Chair welcomed Ms Wall, Director General NIPS to the meeting and thanked her for taking time out of her busy schedule to meet with Members. Ms Wall thanked the Chair for the invite and welcomed the opportunity to brief Members on the work of the Prison Service. She confirmed that since she last met with the Board in November 2023 the challenges faced by NIPS are the same, perhaps worse. She confirmed that the prison population continues to rise and provided a breakdown of numbers across prisons advising that Maghaberry in particular is feeling the pressure. While the male population is relatively stable in Hydebank Wood she confirmed that there was a significant increase amongst females with over 50% being on remand. She advised that the overall increase in remand prisoners made it very challenging to run each of the prisons. She also confirmed that Programmes are being explored to manage this section of the prison population.

Ms Wall provided a breakdown of offences for the average daily prison population for those prisoners under sentence of immediate custody and on remand, reporting that there has been a serious rise in violent offences. She also gave an overview of current staffing within prisons and the recruitment campaign soon to be launched. An outline of the proposed review of PDU was provided with Ms Wall advising Members that a number of concerns had to be addressed including the lack of interventions for remands and the impact of overcrowding and short sentences. Potentially the review will give an evidence base for more resources. The Board recognised the importance of partnership working and this should be reflected in the review. Ms Stewart added that she would value more discussion on the model. The impact of Friday / Saturday release of prisoners and the lack of housing was also raised by Members.

Ms Wall emphasised the importance of the key partnership with Probation. Working relationships with the Parole Commissioners NI and the Health Trusts was also discussed.

The Board Chair concluded the session by thanking Ms Wall for a very comprehensive presentation and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the work of NIPS with the Board.

#### **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. There were no conflicts of interest.

## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

## **3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2024 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 20 September 2024 were approved as a true record.

The Board approved the paper.

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

There was one action from the previous meeting in relation to an amendment to the Strategic Risk Register 2024-25 and Horizon scanning. Both documents have been revised and uploaded to Decision Time for Members to view.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair referred Members and Officials to the paper and highlighted the visit to Burren House on 30 September 2024. In relation to the increasing number of complaints raised by service users, staff had requested feedback on the outcome of such complaints and details of any lessons that could be learned, once the investigation was complete. Members who had attended noted the good relationship between the PBNI Area Managers and NIPS Managers and passed on their thanks to all staff involved in the visit.

The Board noted the paper.

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

Members were asked to note the update on internal engagements with teams which are almost complete. Now that pay modernisation is in place and new PO appointments have commenced, staff engagement during visits has been positive in relation to practice and working in PBNI. Going forward, the Chief Executive hopes to bring a renewed focus on community service, with further visits to placements and teams supervising service users who have been given these community-based sentences.

The Chief Executive updated members on PBNI's Leadership Development Programmes. The Senior Leadership Team participated in Leadership Resilience Training facilitated by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PPRT). Under the Public Protection Advisory Group (PPAG) a cross-border leadership programme for four first level senior management grades from each of the eight PPAG organisations/departments (thirty-two participants) has been developed. Four of PBNI's Assistant Directors will be attending the first session of the programme on 4 November 2024 in Dublin and 4 Area Managers are participating in the Social Work Leadership Programme.

The Chief Executive referred to the work being done through the Reducing Reoffending Strategic Outcomes Group. She had attended a meeting on 21 October 2024 where the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) provided a report on the strategic and policy focus on housing and homelessness, noting it formed part of the draft Programme for Government. Ms Stewart advised that a position paper on housing would be brought to a future Board meeting for consideration as to how PBNI could usefully assist in this area, once the NIHE had outlined what was required.

**Action: The Chief Executive to bring a paper to a future Board meeting on PBNI's position in relation to housing, following a discussion with the Chair and Deputy Chair.**

Ms Montgomery updated Members on teams working to deviations: one with 60% deviation (West Belfast team) and two to 40% (North Belfast and the North West teams). Consideration has been given to transferring Belfast staff from other teams on a temporary basis until staff return from sick leave or new staff are appointed.

The Board Chair expressed concern at the high rate of deviation within these teams and asked if there was anything the Board could do to support staff. The Chief Executive suggested Board Members could visit deviating teams to offer support. The Board Chair agreed and requested that the Board Secretary follow this up. The Board Secretary confirmed that a visit to the West Belfast office had been organised for 6 November 2024.

**Action: Board Secretary to explore facilitating visits to the North Belfast and North West teams in the coming weeks.**

Mr Hamilton confirmed that he would provide an update, when available, on PBNI's contribution to the Public Protection Arrangements, which are currently being reviewed.

The Board noted the paper.

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

There were two items of correspondence to note.

### **7.1 Correspondence from Chief Executive, Belfast City Council to Chief Executive on Vulnerable Adults Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH)**

The Chief Executive confirmed that she had not yet met with the Chief Executive, Belfast City Council in relation to Vulnerable Adults Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) but would provide an update at a future meeting.

### **7.2 Correspondence from Head of NICS to Chief Executive on Violence Against Women and Girls Meeting**

Following receipt of the letter from the Head of NICS, the Chief Executive had attended a meeting on Monday 21 October 2024 to look at identifying ways to change working practices to better protect women and girls in future. Also in attendance were representatives from NIPS, DoJ, PSNI, NIHE and EVAWG.

The Board noted the correspondence.

## **BOARD BUSINESS**

## **8. BRIEFING ON PBNI WORK IN PRISONS (PAPER)**

This paper was provided to Members in preparation for the discussion with Ms Wall and was referred to when the session concluded. The Chief Executive expressed surprise that the Prison Population Working Group had been stood down and believes this was a huge opportunity missed. One member commented that the increased challenges faced by Ms Wall since her visit to the Board last November have impacted on the vision that was set out. Following discussions two actions were agreed.

**Action: A letter be drafted in correspondence to Beverley Wall in relation to PBNI's expectations of the proposed PDU model.**

**Action: The Board Chair to draft correspondence to the DOJ Permanent Secretary in relation to PBNI's membership of the Criminal Justice Board.**

The Board noted the Paper.

## **9. PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT (PFG) CONSULTATION (PAPER)**

The Board Chair advised Members that a Strategic Review Group had been set up to discuss the PBNI response to the PFG consultation. A meeting was held on 21 October 2024 which he attended alongside the Deputy Chair, Board Secretary and members of SLT. The Board Chair also confirmed that he and the Chief Executive attended a briefing on PFG by the Strategic Partnership Forum. The Chief Executive added that she wanted the PBNI response to have a wider focus than Community Safety.

Ms McGreevy provided Members with an overview of the key responses which covered seven of the nine PFG priorities. She also highlighted that PBNI had been named in the PFG for the first time in over fifteen years which was welcome. During discussions Ms Patterson commented that poverty wasn't referred to at all throughout the document. The impact increased police numbers could have on PBNI and other justice agencies was also raised.

The Board Chair thanked Ms McGreevy for her work on the paper.

The Board approved the Paper.

## **10. ANNUAL REOFFENDING STATISTICS – 21/22 COHORT (PAPER)**

Mr Hamilton took Members through the paper and provided further detail around some of the figures. Discussion took place around current measures in place to address reoffending. In response to a question regarding electronic tagging, Mr Hamilton advised that consideration is currently being given to utilising tags with GPS. It was suggested that PBNI consider developing a programme to address re-offending reference burglary and theft which have the highest rates.

In summary, it continues to be the case that community supervision makes a key difference to reducing reoffending and provides important evidence of meaningful outcomes.

The Board noted the Paper.

## **11. KEY STRATEGIES – IMPLICATIONS FOR PBNI (PAPER)**

Mr Hamilton referred Members to the two recently published strategies and outlined their relevance to PBNI. The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (2024-31) was developed and will be overseen by the Department of Health and the Department of Justice in conjunction with the Department for Communities, the Department of Education and the Executive Office. The Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategic Framework (2024-31) is overseen by the Executive Office. Mr Hamilton talked through each summary paper and confirmed the strategy documents would be uploaded to Decision Time.

During discussions it was highlighted that there is a lot of crossover with both Strategies. It was also noted that the Strategies give PBNI a mandate but not currently any additional resources. Discussions also took place around links to the MARAC review, led by the Victims side of the DOJ. Overall Members agreed that the paper demonstrated how PBNI aligns with the Strategies.

**Action: The Board Secretary to arrange the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategic Framework to be uploaded to Decision Time.**

The Board noted the Paper.

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

Ms Sweeney confirmed that the 2024-2025 NJC pay rates, for Pay Points up to and including Point 43 will increase by £1,290 per annum. All NJC Pay Points from 44 to 61 and the Chief Officer pay rates are to receive a 2.5% uplift for 2024-2025. PBNI will now proceed to progress the pay remit for 2024/25 subject to approval. When the DoJ/Dof approval is provided, staff will be informed of the payment date. Mr King confirmed that monies had already been built into the 2024-25 budget.

In response to a member's question regarding any difference in staff retention levels since the pay modernisation, Ms Stewart advised that a pay modernisation post project evaluation would report on sick absence figures, attrition/retention rates and any reduction/increases in deviations.

Ms Sweeney informed Members that a further PO recruitment exercise was commencing in early November 2024 and work had commenced on a retention and training plan for AYE staff in their first three years.

Ms Sweeney advised that sickness levels were still high for a variety of reasons. Following discussion with unions, a review of the Hybrid Working Policy is planned in the next few months.

The Board noted the update.

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

### **13.1 MEMBERS REGISTER OF INTERESTS (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary advised that that Members should update the Register of Interests that is reviewed annually and published on the PBNI website.

The Board noted the paper.

### **13.2 BOARD WORK PLAN 2024-25 (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary referred Members to the paper. The November Board meeting is themed and only urgent Board business will be on the agenda. The Management Information Paper Q2 will be considered at the December Board.

The Board noted the paper.

## **AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

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

There was no update from the previous Board meeting.

The Board noted the update.

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

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

There was no update from the previous Board meeting.

The Board noted the update.

### **15.1 Financial Outturn Report September 2024**

Mr King gave a summary of the September 2024 Financial Outturn Report. There are no significant pressures. The lease for the Enniskillen office is due in March 2025. Estates Department is currently working with the Statistics and Research team to look at the service user profile and location before considering new or shared premises.

The Board noted the Paper.

**16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Board Chair reminded Members of upcoming visits to a community service placement in Bangor and office visits to Ballymena and West Belfast.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2024, 9.30 AM – NEWFORGE SPORTS COMPLEX AND EVENTS HUB, BELFAST**

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

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**Date**