

**PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 2025**

**9.30 AM – CONFERENCE ROOM, PBNI HEADQUARTERS**

**ATTENDANCE**

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Mr M Murray, Chair  
Ms E Patterson, Deputy Chair  
Mr K Donaghy  
Mr B Ingram  
Mr J Johnston  
Ms A Lloyd-Stevens  
Ms B Mongan (Up to item 9 and 12)

**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 J Fitzsimons, Board Secretary  
Mrs A Abraham, Business Support Manager (Minutes)  
Ms F Quail, Information & Governance Officer (Item 12)

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A quorum was confirmed. Ms Lloyd Stevens declared a potential conflict of interest in relation to a section in the Chief Executive's Report (Item 6) regarding a legal case and Public Protection Arrangements.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were recorded from Mrs Brunt, Mrs Magee and Ms McGreevy.

**3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 2024 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 13 December 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record.

The minutes were approved by the Board.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES – FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2024 (PAPER)**

There was one action from the previous meeting in relation to an update report on Deviations from Standards across teams with a focus on solutions to reduce percentages – see agenda item no 10.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair gave a brief summary of meetings and engagements since the last meeting in particular, attendance at a Service Users Forum and visit to the Portadown team. The main points raised by staff in the Portadown office were around PBNI doing more to attract applications through universities, the limitations of the Workload Management Tool, the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Deviations and the increased work pressures due to sick/maternity absences. The Chair referred Members and Officials to Mr Johnston's paper on the visit to the North-West office on 17 December 2024.

The Board noted the update.

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

The Chief Executive Informed Members that PBNI had received the 2025-26 draft budget allocation on Wednesday 29 January. Work was underway to consider the implications of the budget which would be brought to the Board. At this stage, the main pressure in 2025-26 would likely be in relation to the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions but it was hoped that additional funding would become available to offset this. The Chief Executive advised the Members that the reducing reoffending bid to the Transformation Fund was unsuccessful. However, PBNI separately had asked the Department to consider funding the further roll-out of Enhanced Combination Orders (ECOs) to other court areas. £500k additional funding was provided in the budget allocation for ECOs. Officials will consider the work needed to scale the model of ECO back up in the existing court areas from 1 April and commence roll-out to another court area later in the year. A decision has not yet been taken on the court area and an update on this would be provided in due course.

Ms Stewart referred Members to the NIAO report on Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland published in June 2023. The Public Accounts Committee will be undertaking an inquiry into the report with the evidence session with the Department being scheduled for 3 April 2025.

Mr Hamilton confirmed that the Review of the Prisoner Development Model being led by Tom McGonigle is progressing with fieldwork well under way.

The Minister of Justice has asked Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, to undertake a Review of MARA which is to progress with the support of colleagues in HMI Probation, who led on the recent inspection of the Counter Terrorism Joint Thematic Inspection in England and Wales. PBNI are not represented on SMB or MARAP but have been invited at this early stage to discuss the interfaces between PBNI and MARA. This will then inform the Terms of Reference and fieldwork for the inspection.

Two significant reviews have been concluded in relation to the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland: a review of the co-located Public Protection Team and a separate demand review of the public protection arrangements.

The Board noted the update.

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

There were five items of correspondence to note.

### **7.1 DoJ Permanent Secretary to Chief Executive on Public Accounts Committee – Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland**

The correspondence is by way of a formal invitation to the Chief Executive, as PBNI Accounting Officer, to provide evidence at the Public Accounts Committee in respect of the NIAO report 'Reducing Adult Reoffending in NI' published June 2023.

### **7.2 Head of Financial Services Division DoJ to Chief Executive on Staff Payment 2024-25**

The correspondence is by way of confirmation that the Department is content to approve the pay award. This was paid to staff in January 2025 salaries.

### **7.3 DoJ Permanent Secretary to Board Chair on Criminal Justice Board Membership**

The DoJ Permanent Secretary advised that there would be no change to the membership of the Criminal Justice Board at this time and PBNI's input was welcomed.

**Action: Board Chair to write to the DoJ Permanent Secretary in relation to the decision and request further discussion around PBNI's inclusion on the Criminal Justice Board.**

**7.4 Derry City & Strabane Council to Chief Executive – Invitation to present on housing of service users**

Members were asked to note the invitation for PBNI to present at a Special Meeting of the Council on 19 February 2025. Liz Arthur, Assistant Director Public Protection, a local Area Manager and Housing Executive representatives will attend.

**7.5 DoJ Permanent Secretary to Director – Ending Violence against Women and Girls Programme Board and Oversight Board**

The correspondence confirmed PBNI's representation to the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Programme Board and Oversight Board.

The Board noted the correspondence.

**BOARD BUSINESS**

**8. BUSINESS PLAN PERFORMANCE 2024-25 Q3**

Mr Hamilton gave a summary of the Business Plan Performance 2024-25 at Quarter 3. Of the 22 actions, 16 had an Amber (in Progress) rating, 5 had a Green (Complete) and one Red (delayed/not achieved).

The Chair commended Mr Hamilton and senior management colleagues for their work on the Business Plan.

The Board approved the paper.

**9. DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2025-26 (PAPER)**

The Board were asked to note that the Business Plan 2025-26 is a first draft developed without the known budget position. Mr Hamilton talked through the 4 strategic priorities. Discussion took place around the appropriate location of some actions/measures. Members were asked to provide feedback in advance of the final Plan being brought to the February 2025 Board meeting for approval to then issue to the DoJ and Minister for approval.

The Board endorsed the key areas of the Business Plan 2025/26.

**10. STANDARD DEVIATIONS UPDATE (PAPER)**

Ms Montgomery took Members through the paper, highlighting the number of teams currently Deviating from Standards but emphasised that it was a fluid situation dependant on absences across the teams. After discussion it was suggested that the risks around deviations, effect on service users and performance in geographic areas be covered in a paper at a future ARAC meeting. A review of practice of the West Belfast and Lisburn team in the last quarter should be considered.

**Action: The Board Chair requested that the ARAC Chair undertake a deep dive on Standards Deviations across the organisation.**

The Board noted the paper.

**11. PBNI ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE UPDATE (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive referred Members to the actions outlined in the paper to mitigate the impact of issues impacting on organisational resilience and future actions planned. It was intimated that it was too early for PBNl to feel a sense of stability following the implementation of pay modernisation. Further work will take place through the Staff Engagement Forum and how to communicate with staff. Mr Johnston suggested that Board visits follow a consistent approach with an agreed template and was something to be taken forward by the incoming Board. Issues around mobility and staff transfers should be reviewed.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair welcomed Ms Quail to the meeting. Since her presentation to the Board Meeting in August 2024, she had developed an Engagement Plan and included an addendum detailing all the meetings that SLT attends with DoJ. The section 12.1 in relation to the role of the Chief Executive had been amended. The Chief Executive thanked Ms Quail for her work on the Partnership Agreement.

The Board approved the paper for submission to the DoJ for approval.

## **13. STAFF ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive presented the paper in the absence of Ms McGreevy and took questions on some of the results of the survey. It was agreed to incorporate some of the themes provided in the feedback into the next Corporate Plan. It was generally agreed that it was a positive survey compared to results in both 2023 and 2021, with eight of the nine areas showing an increase. It was agreed that some comments would need further consideration and the Chief Executive agreed to take forward.

The Board noted the paper.

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

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

The Board Secretary referred Members and Officials to the paper. Members were asked to note the venue of the February Board meeting is Clifton House followed by a lunch, opened to senior management and staff across various teams and grades. The Board Chair confirmed that he would carry out Board Member appraisals by the end of the month.

The Board noted the paper.

## **AUDIT & RISK ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (ARAC)**

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

There was no update.

## **CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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

There was no update.

#### **16.1 Sick Absence Review Workshop – Update (Paper)**

The Board Chair thanked Mr Johnston and the Committee for their work on sickness absence. Ms Sweeney outlined some of the current work of the Human Resources Department, for example updating the Absence Management Policy and the new approach of Occupational Health providers. Mr Johnson outlined the seven actions that were agreed at the Sick Absence Review Workshop held in December 2024. Of those actions he was particularly keen that piloting Independent Assessment Panels and developing an internal communications plan on this issue were taken forward.

The Board endorsed the actions and noted the update.

**16.2 Financial Outturn Report December 2024 (Paper)**

Mr King referred Members to the Report. Currently PBNI is on target to keep in budget with a small underspend. He also confirmed that a small amount of capital was returned to the DoJ.

The Board noted the paper.

**POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE**

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

There was no update.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

The next scheduled Board meeting will be on Friday 21 February 2025 at 9.30 am in the Boardroom, Clifton House, Belfast.

The meeting ended at 12.47 pm.

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Mr Max Murray CBE  
Board Chair

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Date