

**PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 10 APRIL 2025**

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

**ATTENDANCE**

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Mr Glenn Houston, Board Chair  
Ms E Patterson  
Ms M Brunt (via MS Teams)  
Mr B Ingram  
Mr J Johnston  
Ms D Hunt  
Ms B Mongan  
Mr K Cameron  
Mr D Bowden  
Ms C Keatinge  
Ms G McKeown  
Mr M Mawhinney  
Ms K Anthony (via MS Teams)

**OFFICIALS**

Ms A Stewart, Chief Executive  
Mr S Hamilton, Director of Operations  
Ms G Montgomery, Director of Operations  
Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications  
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)

**GUEST**

Ms Liz Arthur, Assistant Director, Public Protection

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

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and set out the agenda for the day. A quorum was confirmed. Ms Brunt notified the Chair of a potential conflict under Item 10.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

**3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2025 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 21 February 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

The minutes were approved by the Board.

**4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES – FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2025 (PAPER)**

There was one action from the previous meeting – a paper on Causeway onboarding will be brought to a future meeting. Ms Montgomery advised that the go live date for Causeway onboarding had been delayed until January 2026 and that ARAC had been advised to note this on the Strategic Risk Register, from a risk perspective.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Board Chair referred Members to the paper. He congratulated the Chief Executive on her contribution to the Public Accounts Committee and commended the support

provided by the senior leadership team. The report and recommendations will be shared at a future meeting. The Board Chair appreciated the opportunity to engage with teams and welcomed further engagement meetings in the coming weeks. The Board Induction on 21 March 2025 and public accountability training on 31 March 2025 were well received. The Board Chair also had the opportunity to meet with former Chair, Max Murray, and attended the annual Northern Ireland Leadership and Governance Conference and Exhibition organised by the Chief Executive's Forum on 2 April 2025.

The Board noted the update.

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

The Chief Executive referred to the paper and asked Members to note that any emerging issues were covered in the correspondence at agenda item 8. Internal and external engagement meetings were minimal due to the work required for the Public Accounts Committee.

Since the writing of the report, the Chief Executive advised that as a result of a recruitment issue, the Head of HR &OD was undertaking a retrospective review of all PBNI recruitment. The Chief Executive will update the Board in due course.

Members were advised that the bid to the Transformation Board for additional funding to roll out ECOs in another court area was unsuccessful however core funding had now been secured, with roll out planned for June 2025 in the North Antrim court area.

In response to concerns raised about Dismas House from parents of a primary school in South Belfast, Ms Arthur - Assistant Director Public Protection and Ms McGreevy - Head of Communications, had met with those concerned. Similar issues had been raised around accommodation in the North West. The local Area Manager is following up.

The Board noted the update.

## **7. PRESENTATION – PBNI'S ROLE IN PUBLIC PROTECTION**

Mr Hamilton introduced the presentation and gave a brief overview of Ms Arthur's role in the Senior Leadership Team. Ms Arthur thanked the Board for the opportunity to brief members on PBNI's role in Public Protection. The comprehensive presentation included the Risk Management of sexual and domestic violence offenders; Assessment Tools / Interventions in place; an overview of Public Protection Arrangements NI, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Safeguarding Board NI; Approved Premises being used; the learning from various reviews and managing communications and media with partners. A discussion followed and issues raised included the Communications Strategy in relation to sexual offender risk management. Ms McGreevy advised members that managing communications was very much a partnership approach but that there was always room for improvement. The allocation of staff resources for Public Protection and how this was measured was also raised. In responding, Mr Hamilton offered to provide the Board with a percentage breakdown of the Probation Office resource allocated to public protection work within PBNI.

**Action: Mr Hamilton to provide the proportion of staff allocated to Public Protection work (ISU teams)**

The Board Chair thanked Ms Arthur for attending the meeting and providing a comprehensive overview of PBNI's role in this extremely important area.

The Board noted the presentation.

## **8. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER)**

There were eleven items of correspondence to note, some of which were self-explanatory. The Chief Executive referred, in particular, to the correspondence at agenda items 8.3, 8.4.

### **8.1 Correspondence from Acting Permanent Secretary Department of Education to Chief Executive on the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015**

### **8.2 Correspondence from Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Director to Chief Executive – Invite to EVAWG Oversight Board Meeting**

### **8.3 Correspondence between Clerk to the Committee for Justice, NI Assembly to Chief Executive – Invitation to give oral evidence to Justice Committee on the Justice Bill**

The Chief Executive or Ms Montgomery, Director of Operations will be giving oral evidence to the Justice Committee on the Justice Bill, in due course.

### **8.4 Correspondence from the Chief Executive to Lady Chief Justice on Expansion of Enhanced Combination Orders to Ballymena, Coleraine and Antrim courts**

The Board Chair and Chief Executive will be engaging with the Lady Chief Justice in relation to community sentencing, in due course.

### **8.5 Correspondence from Board Chair to Permanent Secretary, DoJ on Membership of Criminal Justice Board**

### **8.6 Correspondence between Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary, DoJ on Expansion of Enhanced Combination Orders**

### **8.7 Correspondence between Chief Executive and Justice Minister – PBNI Business Plan 2025-26 approval**

### **8.8 Correspondence from Permanent Secretary, DoJ to Chief Executive – DoJ Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25**

### **8.9 Correspondence from Chief Executive to Deputy Chief Constable, PSNI – Request for Information**

### **8.10 Correspondence between Senior Oversight Forum Chair, Domestic Homicide Reviews and Chief Executive – DHR Recommendations Working Group**

### **8.11 Correspondence from Chief Inspector, CJINI to Chief Executive – Review of the Multi-Agency Review Arrangements (MARA) in Northern Ireland**

Following discussion, it was agreed that learning from various external reviews would be beneficial.

**Action: A paper capturing learning from reviews to be brought to a future Board meeting.**

The Board noted the correspondence.

## **9. FIRST DAY BRIEF (PAPER)**

The Chief Executive noted that the information had been covered at the Board Induction on 21 March 2025. She referred Members to section 7 on key issues for the new Board. Five areas had been identified: PfG Safer Communities – Reducing Offending and Reoffending; Organisational Review/Resilience and Workload; Building awareness and confidence in the role of community sentencing and work of probation; Developing PBNI as a trauma information organisation to support organisational culture; and External Reviews/Enquiries.

Discussions included managing deviations from PBNI Practice Standards, how the impact is measured and how risk is managed. Ms Montgomery advised Members that resources were always allocated to higher risk cases. The Board Chair questioned the significant rise in attrition rates from November 2023 to January 2025. Ms Sweeney explained that the delay in implementing Pay Modernisation has had an impact on figures and as well as other factors. She also advised that retention was a bigger issue within the organisation, however, officials agreed to review and clarify the specific figure for attrition of probation officers. The drive for HMPPS to draft a single programme for those who offend was also raised and the impact this will have on PBNI.

**Action: Links to be accessible within the First Day Brief Paper and made available in the Resource section on Decision Time**

The Board noted the paper.

## **10. DRAFT DISABILITY AND EQUALITY ACTION PLAN (PAPER)**

Ms Brunt's position as a Commissioner with the Equality Commission was acknowledged.

Ms Sweeney took Members through the key highlights of the Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan 2025-2030 which had been developed and consulted upon to seek to improve equality of opportunity across Section 75 categories and in relation to disability. Feedback had been obtained from staff, the Equality Commission, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and a Service Users Group. It was noted that neurodiversity issues is an emerging area. Feedback from service users and from a victims group was seen as a priority. PBNI's performance against the Equality Action Plan is measured through the Section 75 Annual Report which is submitted to the Equality Commission every August.

Members welcomed the inclusion of neurodiversity and the need to further engage with victims. The specific targeting of men in the Plan was also raised and Ms Sweeney advised that this was due to men being significantly underrepresented in the organisation.

The Board approved the Paper.

## **11. DRAFT FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2024-25 (PAPER)**

Mr King gave a summary of the draft paper, confirming that the 2024-25 budget had an overspend of £120k, but with the approval of the Department. Capital underspend of £269k was due to a delay in works at the Ormeau Road office. £1m has been earmarked

in 2025-26 for estates refresh work. There will be £260k pressure in respect of the National Insurance increase. The final budget paper 2024-25 will be brought to the May 2025 Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

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

### **12.1 PBNI STANDING ORDERS REVIEW (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary gave a brief summary of the paper, explaining that the Standing Orders were reviewed every three years. The main changes were outlined:

- the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) had now been replaced by the Partnership Agreement
- the quorum for meetings increased from five to six. The full Board comprises 13 Members
- references to 'Strangers' had been replaced with 'Visitors'
- misconduct at meetings had been reworded.

Once approved the paper will be provided to the DoJ as a courtesy and published on the PBNI website.

The Board approved the paper.

### **12.2 SCHEME OF DELEGATION AND POWERS REVIEW (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary advised that as part of the continuing review of the governance arrangements, the Scheme of Delegation and Powers had been reviewed and amended, with changes noted in red. The changes were not significant and included the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) being replaced by the Partnership Agreement.

The Board approved the paper.

### **12.3 SCHEDULE OF BOARD MEETINGS 2025 – 26 (PAPER)**

The schedule of dates for Board and Committee meetings was agreed, with a review scheduled in October 2025.

The Board approved the paper.

### **12.4 MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary advised members that the proposed membership and Chair of each Committee was outlined on page 2 of the paper. It was proposed that Mr Ingram OBE remain as Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Ms Mongan OBE remain as Chair of the Policy and Practice Committee and Mr Mawhinney be appointed Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee.

She also explained that at the first meeting of each Committee, the appointed Chair will seek expressions of interest from the other Committee Members for the role of Deputy Chair and by consensus reach a decision. The nominations will then be brought to the Board for approval.

The Board Chair advised that the Chairs for each Committee will be reviewed during March 2026.

Members approved the membership of each Committee and the Committee Chairs.

### **12.5 DRAFT BOARD ANNUAL SUBMISSION (PAPER)**

Members were asked to review the draft Board submission for the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 and to advise the Board Secretary of any changes to the Register of Interests as at 31 March 2025.

The Board noted the paper.

### **12.6 BOARD WORK PLAN 2025-26 (PAPER)**

The Board Secretary presented the draft Board Work Plan 2025/26 to Members, advising that it was a fluid document and is brought to every formal Board meeting for consideration.

The Board noted the paper.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Board Chair reminded Members of an opportunity to visit a Community Service project on 28 April 2025. Any Member keen to attend should contact the Board Secretary.

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday 15 May 2025 at 9.30 am in PBNI HQ, Conference Room.

The meeting ended at 12.22 pm.

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Mr Glenn Houston  
Board Chair

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Date