

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2025

9.30 AM – CONFERENCE ROOM, PBNI HEADQUARTERS

ATTENDANCE

BOARD MEMBERS

Mr Glenn Houston, Board Chair
Ms E Patterson
Ms K Anthony
Ms M Brunt
Mr B Ingram
Mr J Johnston
Ms D Hunt
Ms B Mongan
Mr K Cameron
Mr D Bowden
Ms G McKeown
Mr M Mawhinney

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)

GUESTS

Ms Emer Loughran, Assistant Director, Urban (Items 1 to 7)
Ms Jill Grant, Assistant Director, Rural (Items 1 to 7)

1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the agenda for the meeting. A quorum was confirmed. There were no conflicts of interest.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There was an apology from Ms Keatinge.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025 (PAPER)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Thursday 15 May 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

The minutes were approved by the Board.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES – THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025 (PAPER)

There were two actions from the previous meeting. One had been completed and the other remained open, regarding an Estates update at the May 2026 Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Board Chair referred Members to the paper and provided an update on his visit with the Chief Executive and Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, DoJ, to the Newry office, which included a Community Service Project in the area. He also provided an overview of his visits to regional offices and to Hydebank College and Women's Prison, accompanied by the Chief Executive. He had meetings with both the NAPO and NIPSA Trade Union representatives, attended a professional practice seminar in

the Probation Service Headquarters in Dublin and the NIAO's launch of 'Effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committees Good Practice Guide (June 2025)'.

In relation to Board Members' Appraisals, the Board Chair confirmed that a revised proforma had been devised, for completion in Q1 April-June 2026.

Action: The Board Secretary to circulate the revised Appraisal Template to Board Members.

The Board Chair explained that following the updated guidance issued in July 2023 from the Department of Finance on Conflicts of Interest, there is a requirement to document how potential conflicts are being managed, including for example, Board members involvement in any employment related legal cases within PBNI. In line with the updated guidance and Conflicts of Interests Policy each form has been reviewed by the Board Chair and the required actions added.

Action: The Board Secretary to send revised Declaration of Interest Forms which require added actions to relevant Members.

The Board Chair outlined the steps required to develop the next Corporate Plan 2026-29. The launch of the process will be at the Board Workshop on 21 August 2025, with the aim that the new strategy is available for Board approval in February 2026.

The Board Chair confirmed that the Justice Minister had accepted his invitation to meet the Board at a meeting on Thursday 16 October 2025. This meeting will be in the afternoon to accommodate the Justice Minister's diary.

Reports on Members' visits to regional offices (Andersonstown Road, Intensive Supervision Unit, Belfast and Shipquay Street) were provided. Officials responded to various issues raised by staff members and teams. Discussion took place around a new Board Visits Template. Ms Mongan suggested that reference to Trauma Informed Practice could be included in the template.

Action: The Board Secretary to circulate the revised Board Visits Template to Members for future use.

Ms Hunt gave an update on the Lady Chief Justice's lecture "Sentencing Practice in NI – a view" held at Ulster University on 20 May 2025. The Lady Chief Justice was very complimentary about the PBNI Chief Executive and PBNI's involvement in community sentencing.

The Board noted the update.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Chief Executive referred to the paper, highlighting engagements and issues which had taken place since the May 2025 Board meeting.

A series of external events and meetings, detailed in the report, had taken place which will aid the development of the Corporate Plan 2026-29.

PBNI provided a written response and oral evidence to the Committee for Justice as part of the consultation on the Justice Bill. The Chief Executive advised that as a follow

up to the oral evidence session, the Committee requested views on further issues and a copy of the response is included in the pack for the meeting.

There will be a second tranche of applications to the Public Sector Transformation Fund and currently PBNI is in discussion with the DoJ to refresh the proposal for the roll out of Enhanced Combination Orders (ECO).

PBNI and the Probation Service Ireland are currently in discussion regarding a potential pilot project for the use of AI for pre-sentence reports.

There were two emerging issues to note relating to ongoing engagements with local community representatives on approved premises and work to support the relaunch of Enhanced Combination Orders (ECOs), including their introduction in the North Antrim Court area. The Chief Executive advised that the first issue, specifically concerning approved premises, is being monitored by the senior leadership team and may be escalated from the Operational Departmental Risk Register to the Strategic Risk Register. An update on ECOs will be provided to the Board as it progresses.

The Board noted the update.

7. PRESENTATION – SERIOUS FURTHER OFFENCES, PRACTICE STANDARDS AND DEVIATIONS

The Board Chair welcomed Ms Loughran and Ms Grant to the meeting, to present to Members on Serious Further Offences (SFOs), Practice Standards and Deviations. The Board Chair invited Ms Montgomery to introduce the session.

Ms Loughran provided background to the establishment of Practice Standards and the overall purpose. She explained the key areas of responsibility, the benefits of the Standards and challenges faced. She also advised Members of the processes in place to receive feedback, review and subsequently improve practice.

Ms Grant outlined the purpose of the SFO procedures and the reporting mechanism, which included assurances to victims, the families and the wider public. She outlined the Service User criteria and the 3-stage process including lessons learned. Ms Grant also advised members of the staff support in place and the electronic tracking system.

A discussion with Members followed, which included the rationale for charging the Service User within 20 working days of the offence being committed and managing media reporting. A question was also raised by a member in relation to the audit and review of the SFO process. In response Ms McGreevy confirmed that the process is periodically reviewed and more formally every three years. During discussions it was also confirmed that PBNI has no unallocated cases which was welcomed by the Board Chair.

Mr Hamilton also advised Members that Domestic Homicide Reviews were another mechanism to influence learning within PBNI. Ms Mongan, PPC Chair also informed the meeting of the role of PPC in monitoring deviations from standards.

Ms Stewart recommended that Members be provided with a copy of the paper on Standards Deviations that was brought to the January 2025 Board by Ms Montgomery.

Action: Board Secretary to add the January 2025 Standards Deviations Board paper to the resources section on Decision Time.

The Board Chair thanked Ms Loughran and Ms Grant for attending the meeting and providing Members with a comprehensive overview of SFOs, Practice Standards and Deviations.

The Board noted the presentation.

8. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER)

There were four items of correspondence to note, some of which were self-explanatory.

8.1 Correspondence between Justice Committee Clerk and Chief Executive on Justice Bill Follow Up to Oral Evidence

8.2 Correspondence to Chair of High Sheriff's Office from the Chief Executive on High Sheriff Awards

8.3 Correspondence from Chief Executive, Belfast City Council to Chief Executive on Shared Approach to Vulnerability

8.4 Correspondence between Matthew O'Toole MLA and Head of Communications on Approved Premises

Discussion took place around PBNi's approach to the issues raised around approved premises. Ms McGreevy updated Members on her meeting with concerned residents.

The Board noted the correspondence.

BOARD BUSINESS

9. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT (PAPER)

The Chief Executive asked for feedback from Members on the format of the quarterly report.

Mr Hamilton explained how the Workload Management Tool was used to calculate caseload for each team on a fair and equitable basis.

Ms Montgomery responded to questions on Serious Further Offences (SFOs), advising that the increase in 2024-25 could mainly be attributed to the inclusion of non-fatal strangulation as a SFO category.

In respect of victim's information, it was agreed that an explanatory note detailing registering and deregistration of victims should be included.

Ms McGreevy advised that there had been an increase in Subject Access Requests (SARS) early in the year from staff, which has now declined and an increase in requests from service users, perhaps in advance of them raising official complaints.

Ms Mongan, PPC Chair, confirmed that the PPC was now considering statistics and trends as a standing agenda item and suggested that the DP Statistician be invited to give a presentation at a future Board meeting.

Action: Board Secretary to invite the DP Statistician to a future Board Meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

10. END OF YEAR BUSINESS PLAN PERFORMANCE (PAPER)

Mr Hamilton gave an overview of the 2024-25 Business Plan performance. Of the twenty-two actions, six had an Amber (in progress) rating and 16 had a Green (complete) rating. He went through the significant improvements in each of the measurable areas: People, Services, Resources and Partnerships.

The Board Chair welcomed the number of green actions and queried if the amber status of six actions would continue to be monitored. Mr Hamilton assured Members that they will not be lost sight of. Sickness absence and attrition rate figures, the Onboarding Causeway Programme, PBNI Trauma Informed approach and timelines for the Organisational Review were also discussed.

The Board approved the paper.

11. LEARNING CAPTURED FROM REVIEWS (PAPER)

Ms Montgomery took Members through the paper which outlined the internal and external review mechanisms. Each review provides PBNI with an opportunity to reflect on practice and to improve/amend practice with the aim of reducing similar adverse incidents occurring.

The Board noted the paper.

12. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS (VERBAL)

12.1 Board Work Plan 2025-26 (Paper)

Members were asked to review the paper and advise the Board Secretary of any additional agenda items.

The Board noted the paper.

13. COMMUNICATIONS DASHBOARD (PAPER)

Ms McGreevy summarised the key events and issues that had taken place since the May Board meeting. Members were asked to note the inclusion of PBNI's responses to external consultations, which are considered as a standing item at PPC.

The Board noted the paper.

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

14. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Committee Chair gave a summary of the paper, highlighting the work of the Committee at the meeting on 12 June 2025.

Action: Board Secretary to circulate the presentation on data sharing which had been given at the June ARAC meeting

14.1 Draft Strategic Risk Register Q2 2025-26 (Paper)

The Board Secretary took Members through the strategic risk register Q2 and horizon scanning which had been reviewed. There had been no changes to the inherent and residual scores for Q2 within the six risk areas. The controls and actions for Risks 2, 3, 5 and 6 had been updated. ARAC had reviewed the register at its meeting on 12 June 2025 and recommended it be approved by the Board.

The Board approved the paper.

14.2 Year End Accounts for 2024-25 (Paper)

Mr King confirmed that a final version of the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 would be circulated once the final accounts are laid.

The Board Chair thanked Mr King and his team for their work.

The Board approved the paper.

14.3 Report to Those Charged with Governance (Paper)

Mr King updated Members on the draft Report to those charged with Governance setting out the findings of the audit on the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025.

The Board noted the paper.

CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Committee Chair took Members through the paper, summarising the business reviewed at the meeting on 30 May 2025.

15.1 Allocated Budget 2025-26 (Paper)

Mr King gave a summary of the paper, which set out PBNI's budget position for 2025-26 and highlighted the current pressure of £888k. He talked through the proposed actions to reduce this pressure.

The Board approved the paper.

15.2 DoJ 5-year Departmental Plan – commissioning note and assumptions

Mr King explained that the DoJ had commissioned the initial work to contribute to their 5-year departmental plan 2025-26 to 2029-30 and explained that it is intended to be a strategic corporate document rather than just a financial analysis. Its aim is to look at possible areas for transformation, collaboration and early intervention, as well as identifying options for closing any funding gap.

The Board noted the paper.

POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE

16. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Committee Chair updated Members on the business reviewed at its meeting on 5 June 2025.

The Board noted the update.

16.1 Review of Programmes Terms of Reference (Paper)

Members were asked to consider the Terms of Reference for the Review of Programmes which set out to evaluate the current delivery model and explore alternative evidence-based approaches used internationally.

The Board approved paper.

16.2 Women's Strategy (Paper)

Mr Hamilton provided a summary of the paper and the Action Plan to achieve the Women's strategy.

The Board approved the paper.

OTHER BUSINESS

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (VERBAL)

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday 18 September 2025 at 9.30 am in PBNI HQ, Conference Room.

The meeting ended at 1.05 pm.

Mr Glenn Houston
Board Chair

Date