

# PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

## BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 23 APRIL 2026

### 9.30 AM – CONFERENCE ROOM, PBNI HEADQUARTERS

#### ATTENDANCE

##### BOARD MEMBERS

Mr Glenn Houston, Board Chair  
Ms B Mongan, Deputy Chair  
Ms K Anthony  
Mr J Johnston  
Mr M Mawhinney  
Ms E Patterson  
Mr B Ingram  
Ms D Hunt  
Mr K Cameron  
Ms G McKeown (up to Item 8)  
Mr B Payne  
Ms M Brunt (MS Teams Items 1-4 and 8-17)

##### 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

Mr Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (Items 1 – 3)

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

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to Mr Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (DoJ). There were no conflicts of interest. A quorum was confirmed.

#### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Mr D Bowden.

#### 3. PRESENTATION: DOJ PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Board Chair thanked Mr. Widdis for attending the first Board meeting of the reporting year. He explained that it was an opportunity to meet Board Members and to outline DoJ's priorities and challenges over the next three years.

The Permanent Secretary thanked the Board Chair for the invitation. He highlighted the challenges surrounding the draft three-year budget with approximately a £100m deficit in the first year 2026/27 being faced across the DoJ allocation. He advised that this was not an executive draft budget but a proposal from the Finance Minister and confirmed there was no assessment of when the final allocation would be agreed. Mr Widdis outlined the progress with Speeding up Justice acknowledging the part the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO) has to play. He also raised the challenges around the increasing prison population and the need for a long-term resolution.

Discussions focused on the draft indicative budget and the impact this will have on Probation and the wider justice system. Other points raised included progress on the Sentencing Bill, including the potential for Supervised Suspended Sentence Orders to

increase PBNI workload, future funding for the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), overcrowding in prisons, progress on the Criminal Justice Vision and the forthcoming Doubleband documentary entitled 'Carl Frampton on Probation' due to be broadcast in May.

The Board Chair thanked Mr Widdis for providing the Board with an opportunity to discuss key priorities and challenges in the next three years for both the DoJ and PBNI.

#### **4. MINUTES OF MEETINGS**

##### **4.1 MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2026 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Thursday 19 February 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record.

The Board approved the paper.

##### **4.2 MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2026 (PAPER)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Thursday 19 February 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record. The Chair asked Members to note that purchase the adjoining premises at the Armagh office had subsequently been successful.

The Board approved the paper.

#### **5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES – THURSDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2026 (PAPER)**

There was one action from the February Board meeting, which had been completed. It was agreed that the Board Secretary would keep a record of outstanding actions from previous meetings. There were two outstanding actions from the November 2025 meeting in relation to papers being brought to future meetings. The Chief Executive to provide a paper regarding PBNI's response to the MARA report. The Head of HR & L&OD to report to CRC and the Board on the outcome of the recent Job Evaluation appeal cases.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **6. CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)**

The Board Chair referred members to the paper and highlighted various visits. The Board Chair visited the Black Mountain Shared Community Service Project on 4 March 2026. Newton Emerson, a freelance columnist for the Irish News and Sunday Life, attended following his article in the Irish News 'Where are all the offenders doing Community Service?' Mr Emerson is keen to meet following the Doubleband documentary.

On 9 April 2026, the Board Chair and Mr Bowden attended the Substance Misuse Court session in Laganside Courts, overseen by Presiding District Judge Keown. There will be an opportunity for Members to attend future court sessions.

On 16 April 2026, the Board Chair attended the Service Users Forum in the Armagh office.

The Board Chair attended two conferences – the annual Leadership and Governance Conference on 25 March 2026, and the annual conference organised by the Commissioner Designate for the Victims of Crime on 27 March.

The Board noted the paper.

### **6.1 Reports from Board Visits and Events (Paper)**

Three visits to teams had taken place since the February 2026 Board meeting: the Ormeau Road office including the Psychology team; the Ballymena office including the Learning and Organisational Development team; and the Public Protection Team's new office at Antrim Road. Reports on each visit were provided by Ms Anthony, Ms McKeown and Ms Mongan.

The Board noted the paper.

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

The Chief Executive asked Members to note the key internal and external engagement meetings since the February 2026 Board meeting. Members were advised that positive feedback had been received from Area Managers following the meeting to discuss the draft Terms of Reference for the Area Managers/Organisational Review.

### **Key Issues**

#### **Corporate Plan 2026-29**

The Department of Justice (DoJ) has advised that the three-year draft Corporate Plan and the draft Annual Business Plan 2026–27 will not be submitted to the Minister for approval until confirmation of a final budget is received. PBNI continues to engage with the DoJ on areas requiring clarification, particularly in relation to resourcing and confirmation that the proposed objectives are deliverable within the indicative budget allocations.

#### **NIAO Report on Partnership Agreements**

PBNI signed a Partnership Agreement with the DoJ in February 2025. Work is progressing to update and review the associated Engagement Plan.

#### **Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill**

PBNI have been asked to submit a response to the Committee for Justice. The Chief Executive advised that a draft response was provided for discussion later in the meeting.

#### **Causeway On-boarding**

The revised planned 'go live' date for Causeway is 1 June 2026, subject to endorsement by the Project Board at its meeting on 15 May 2026.

**Action: An update on the introduction and progress of Causeway On-boarding Phase 1 to be provided to the Board at its June 2026 meeting**

**Matter Relating to a PBNI Office (Shipquay Street).**

The Chief Executive updated Members on the incident that occurred on 6 March 2026, including actions taken by staff and managers and she advised the Board of ongoing contact with the PSNI.

### **PBNI Legal Case – Industrial Tribunal**

There has been a delay in proceedings, due to a change in the claimant's solicitor. A further update will be provided once the position has been confirmed.

### **NIPS Prisoner Development Model Review**

The Chief Executive advised that there had been no further information from the Northern Ireland Prison Service on the review of the Prisoner Development Model.

Members discussed the funding challenges currently being experienced by the community and voluntary sector.

**Action: The Board Chair to write to the Permanent Secretary, DoJ, expressing thanks for his presentation to the Board and referring to the Board's agreed principles to guide resource management and decision-making on the PBNI's budget.**

**Action: The Board Chair to write a letter of support in response to the correspondence regarding Thompson House, copying in the Chair of Northern Ireland Housing Executive.**

## **BOARD BUSINESS**

### **8. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT Q3 (PAPER)**

Mr Hamilton gave a summary of the caseload figures at Q3. Caseload remains steady, whilst there had been a slight increase in reports. The barristers' strike is ongoing. There are no plans to provide additional court space once this is resolved and the advice from NICTS thus far has been that cases will be dealt with during normal business.

Ms Montgomery updated Members on the position on outstanding warrants. It has been agreed by the Presiding District Judge to withdraw a number of these warrants as they relate to historical cases for lower-level offences. A quarterly update on active warrants will be provided in future Management Information papers.

There had been four serious further offences (SFOs) in Quarter 3. One case occurred in a team where deviations to standards applied, however correct procedures were followed. The annual review of SFOs will be used at future staff learning events.

Ms Sweeney referred Members to the tables of absence figures for Q3. Sickness absence is down on Q2. Operational Administration represents the highest percentage of recorded absence on a consistent basis, followed by Probation Officers. The main reason for absence was stress/anxiety/depression, and this is a consistent pattern. Members were asked to note the current recruitment activity, and the learning and development activity in Q3.

Mr King confirmed that PBNI had submitted its first return on carbon mitigation plans. Updates were provided on the Estates projects Belfast Phase 1 (HQ and Duncairn), with the project being heavily dependent on funding being made available in 2026-27 and

2027-28.

Ms McGreevy gave a summary of data incidents, complaints and subject access and FOI requests in Q3.

The Board noted the paper.

## **9. INDICATIVE BUDGET 2026-27 TO 2028-29 (PAPER)**

Mr King confirmed that the draft Budget is still not agreed and there remains uncertainty over a 3-year settlement being finalised.

Assuming that PBNI will not have access to additional funding, a set of funding principles have been agreed to aid decision making. It is proposed to maintain the current funding allocations to the Community and Voluntary Sector (NIACRO Skillset, Through the Gate and Community Service Placements). The Capital allocation is significantly short of the level required by DoJ business areas. The initial allocation has been provided for 2026-27 Capital and is ringfenced for upcoming PBNI lease renewals but provides no Capital funding for investment purposes in relation to IT or Sustainability. With the constrained Capital funding, this will impact on PBNI's ability to deliver against the Corporate Plan priority around future proofing and sustainability. The Estates Department is working on a revised floor plan for HQ, which will depend on funding for Year 2.

The Board noted the paper.

## **10. PBNI RESPONSE TO SENTENCING BILL – DRAFT (PAPER)**

Ms Montgomery referred Members to the paper which summarised the overhaul of Northern Ireland's sentencing structure. Supervised Suspended Sentence Orders (SSSOs) will have the biggest implications for PBNI and could possibly double the caseload and have an impact for staff in respect of training.

**Action: Officials to provide further detail on the implications of new work.**

The Board noted the paper.

## **11. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS (VERBAL)**

The Board Secretary requested any further amendments to the Register of Interests as soon as possible. The Board Members' annual appraisals will take place during week commencing 27 April 2026. Members were reminded to complete any outstanding e-learning.

### **11.1 Board Effectiveness Review (Paper)**

The Board Secretary asked Members to review the overall results of the self-assessment and agree appropriate actions to address the issues identified for improvement, going forward. The Board Chair agreed that these could be discussed with Members at the annual appraisals.

The Board noted the paper.

### **11.2 Draft Board Annual Submission (Paper)**

The Board Secretary asked members to review the information and advise of any changes by 7 May 2026.

The Board noted the paper.

### **11.3 Board Work Plan 2026-27 (Paper)**

Members were asked to note the Board Work Plan 2026-27.

The Board noted the paper.

## **12. COMMUNICATIONS DASHBOARD (PAPER)**

Ms McGreevy highlighted the key events and issues which had taken place since the February Board meeting. The Launch of the Service User Involvement Strategy will take place on 24 April 2026 at Clifton House, Belfast. The final 2 episodes of the Doubleband documentary will be reviewed today. A communications plan is in place in the week leading up to the screening, provisionally 18 May 2026. PBNI has been invited to participate in the Nolan show.

The Board noted the paper

## **AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

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

The Committee Chair had no updates to report since the February Board meeting.

The Board noted the update.

## **CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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

The Committee Chair referred Members to the paper. It was noted that Ms Anthony had been nominated by the Committee as the Sustainability Champion. The Board endorsed the nomination. Sustainability will be a standard item on the CRC agenda.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **14.1 Incremental Pay Progression Procedures (Paper)**

Ms Sweeney referred Members to the paper and advised that one paragraph on Page 13 in relation to sickness absence should have been removed.

The Board approved the paper.

#### **14.2 Financial Outturn Report – March 2026 (Paper)**

The paper set out the draft outturn position for the financial year 2025-26 as at 31 March 2026. The purchase of the Armagh property had been included.

The Board Chair congratulated the Executive team for their stewardship of resources ensuring that PBNI met budget targets.

The Board noted the paper.

## **POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE**

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

The Committee Chair provided an update from the PPC meeting held on 12 March 2026. Dr Payne was welcomed to his first PPC meeting. The paper set out the work of the committee including a review of Court Letters, review of Victims Information Schemes Final Report, Trauma & Resilience Implementation Plan, Programmes Review, Responsive Case Management and ACE Outcomes audit.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **15.1 Programmes Review (Paper)**

Mr Hamilton gave a summary of the comprehensive paper provided by Mr McCracken, Principal Psychologist. He advised Members that the programmes would be delivered to a relatively small cohort of SUs across a number of sites in PBNI. Ms Mongan highlighted that the Programme Review has been an organisational risk and commended Mr Hamilton and Mr McCracken on their work on the review.

Members were asked to approve the decision to adopt Building Choices programme alongside the continued delivery of PPRP and to endorse the amalgamation of the ISU and Regional programmes teams.

The Board approved the paper.

#### **15.2 Trauma and Resilience Implementation Plan (Paper)**

The paper, provided by Mr McCracken, outlined progress made to date on the Trauma and Resilience Implementation Plan.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **15.3 Review of Victims Information Schemes – Final Report (Paper)**

Ms Montgomery referred Members to the summary paper of the Review of Victims Information Schemes – Final Report. Members were asked to note the nine actions for PBNI which will be monitored through PPC.

The Board noted the paper.

### **16. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER)**

There were nine items of correspondence to note, most of which were self-explanatory. The Chief Executive confirmed that these had been covered in other reports on the agenda.

#### **16.1 Between Board Chair and Justice Minister on PBNI Corporate Plan 2026-29 and Annual Business Plan 2026-27**

#### **16.2 Interim Director, Council for Social Witness, Presbyterian Church in Ireland to DoJ and DfC Ministers on Thompson House Approved Premises**

- 16.3 Chief Executive to Assistant Chief Constable on a Matter Relating to a PBNI Office**
- 16.4 Justice Performance Team, DoJ to Chief Executive on an Invitation to Criminal Justice Workshops**
- 16.5 Permanent Secretary, DoJ to Chief Executive on Department of Justice – Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26**
- 16.6 Between Public Protection Branch, DoJ and Chief Executive on Publication by DoJ of an Independent Review**
- 16.7 Chair and Head of UK Secretariat, National Preventative Mechanism to Chief Executive on an Invitation to Expert Roundtable**
- 16.8 Clerk to the Justice Committee, NI Assembly to Chief Executive on the Criminal Justice (sentencing etc) Bill Call for Evidence**
- 16.9 Office of Identity and Cultural Expression to Chief Executive on an Invitation to Participate in Facilitated Discussions with Other Public Bodies**

The Board noted the correspondence.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (VERBAL)**

There was no other business.

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday 21 May 2026 at 9.30 am in PBNI HQ, Conference Room.

The meeting ended at 12.43 pm.

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Mr Glenn Houston  
Board Chair

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Date