

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – 20 JANUARY 2012

321ST MEETING – 24TH OF TENTH TERM OF OFFICE

1. ATTENDANCE

1.1 Present

Mr R Spence (Chairman)
Mr J Quinn (Deputy Chairman) (to item 3)

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| Mrs H McCartan | Mrs V Patterson |
| Mr J McKeever | Mr D Rose |
| Mr B Mooney | Mr M Wardlow (to item 3) |
| Mr B Osborne | Dr R Wilson |
| Mrs M O'Rourke | |

1.2 Officials

Mr B McCaughey (Director)
Mr D van der Merwe (Deputy Director Finance and Corporate Services)
Mr P Doran (Deputy Director Operations)
Ms C Lamont (Deputy Director Operations)
Mr P Moss (Board Secretary)
Ms L Cooper (Head of Business Planning and Development)
Ms G McGreevy (Head of Communications)
Ms S Forrester (Secretariat)

1.3 Also in attendance (to item 3)

Professor Andrew Coyle
Professor Fergus McNeill

Mr Peter May, Department of Justice
Mr Brian Grzymek, Department of Justice
Mr Gareth Johnston, Department of Justice

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mrs Jennett and Mr McNeill.

3. Business Planning for 2012/13 (Paper 2/12)

The Chairman welcomed the guest speakers and the guests from the Department of Justice.

He introduced this part of the meeting, saying that this Business Planning session provided an opportunity to examine whether the 2011-2014 Corporate Plan still provided the right context for PBNI, given the wider financial situation and the devolution of policing and justice. PBNI intended to reply to the Programme for

Government (PFG) consultation urging a clear and strong commitment to a radical and effective approach to reducing re-offending.

The Chairman welcomed the good working relationship with DoJ. He reflected on the meetings of the Probation Chairs group which he regularly attended and the visit which he and the Director had recently made to the Wales Probation Trust.

He raised the issue of resources, expressing the view that resources should follow developments in strategy. Northern Ireland was starting from a low point (compared for example to Wales) in terms of spend per head on Probation.

The Director expressed his intention to offer a scan of the environment in which PBNI was operating. He emphasised the importance of communicating PBNI's message. PBNI had perhaps placed too much emphasis on explaining why people offended as opposed to highlighting the work which it did with those who offended and the effectiveness of that work.

He talked through the various commitments in the Hillsborough Agreement and the progress to date. He highlighted the Youth Justice Review and the Prisons Review and the particular recommendations of significance to PBNI. The Review of Community Sentences was also relevant not least in terms of perceptions around the role of PBNI.

The draft Programme for Government was currently out for consultation and the DoJ had agreed seven commitments under two of the five priorities. PBNI would be making a substantive response and had noted that there were neither targets in the document nor any accompanying legislative programme.

He concluded by restating PBNI's five Corporate Plan themes as they currently stood in the 2011-2014 Plan.

The Head of Business Planning and Development talked through the areas of organisational purpose, organisational workload and achievements to date. She outlined a number of new initiatives, namely the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending, the Reducing Offending Partnership, Supervised Activity Order Pilot, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and Victim Information Scheme amalgamation.

Professor Coyle expressed the view that PBNI had made very significant progress in recent years and had managed these changes by evolution from within rather than revolution from without. He considered that Northern Ireland had avoided many of the pitfalls associated with NOMS and developed a Probation service which was delivered locally. PBNI also focused on the individual not merely as an offender, but as a human being. To build on this success there was now a role for Probation in the broader strategy of government and in being a bridge and catalyst to involve statutory and voluntary bodies.

Professor McNeill expressed the view that there was much to envy in PBNI's retention of the social work tradition as the principal bedrock for delivering good practice and in PBNI's distinctive place in the criminal justice structure. He tabled an article entitled "Counterblast: A Copernican Correction for Community Sentences" and highlighted the diagram on page 97, arguing that there was a need for a re-configuration, so that the centre of focus was the person changing, rather than the

treatment programme. He discussed desistance and noted the emphasis on “What Works” which arose from a focus on the effectiveness of interventions and suggested that it could be useful to focus on “What Matters” ie what made a difference to the people Probation was trying to support and their victims. He urged Probation not just to focus on enhancing its core Probation work but to become a thought leading entrepreneur of solutions. PBNI should focus on the part it played in delivering justice and not just be perceived as the organisation which “fixed people” for the rest of society.

In the subsequent discussion, a number of themes were explored:

- mental health was a cross-departmental issue
- the ways in which Probation’s workload might look different by 2015
- how Probation listened to the voice of the service user
- service users could be a resource in themselves
- there was now a window of opportunity in Northern Ireland for PBNI to contribute to public debate to help persuade others of the benefits of the work it carried out
- a wider debate on behaviours which needed to be minimised might help PBNI focus on its core activities
- care needed to be taken in terms of who owned outcomes - effectiveness should be measured, but an organisation could also be accountable for quality

The Director thanked everyone for their contributions and endorsements. He concluded that PBNI did not want to be insular, but wanted to be thought leaders and there was a real opportunity over the next two year of the Corporate Plan to do this. The existing Corporate Plan captured PBNI’s unique contribution, but maybe not its whole value. PBNI would develop its objectives for Year 2 and be mindful of other jurisdictions.

The Chairman endorsed the appreciation for the guest speakers.

4. Programme for Government: PBNI Response (Paper 3/12)

The Chairman outlined the timetable for submission.

The possibility was raised of including a reference to the Strategy for Women Offenders.

It was agreed that this draft would form the basis for a submission to the Justice Committee who had asked for sight of it by 29 January.

Action: Head of Communications

5. Community Development Supplementary Funding Round 2011/12
(Paper 1/12)

The Deputy Director Finance and Corporate Services presented the paper.

He explained that a potential underspend in the 2011/12 financial year had been identified. It had been decided to initiate a supplementary Community Development funding round which would both address the underspend and assist PBNI staff in managing the increased community service workload.

The Allocation Panel had met and taken a number of decisions which the Board was asked to note.

The Board was also asked to approve four recommendations which brought the cumulative totals to the respective organisations to over £50k as follows:

- Community Restorative Justice Ireland - £6,000 bringing cumulative total to £51,000
- West Belfast Parent & Youth Support Group – Roghanna project - £7,780 bringing cumulative total to £52,780
- Women’s Aid Federation NI - £10,000 bringing cumulative total to £90,000
- NIACRO Family Links, APAC and Youth Employability - £3,772 bringing cumulative total to £138,772

Approval would be sought from DoJ for the NIACRO funding as it was in excess of £100k.

The Board approved the grants above £50k and noted the rest of the information presented.

Action: Deputy Director Finance and Corporate Services

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) The Chairman invited Members to reflect on the earlier Business Planning session. Members commented on the role which the guest speakers could play in terms of advocacy and outreach. It was suggested that the discussion around a role for PBNI as thought leaders and influencers should be reflected in the Board’s Communications objectives.

The possibility of organising a further series of Blue Skies style seminars was raised.

Action: Director/Head of Communications

(ii) In response to a query, the Director agreed to seek clarification regarding the timetable for possible recruitment of new Board Members.

Action: Director

(iii) The Chairman referred to a drop-in event at Parliament Buildings which a number of MLAs had attended. It was agreed to explore further the possibility of PBNI undertaking such an event.

Action: Chairman/Director/Head of Communications

(iv) It was agreed that the Board should meet later in the year at an external venue.

Action: Chairman/Secretariat

(v) The Chairman confirmed that the Accountability Review would take place on 15 February at the Learning & Development Centre, Antrim. A programme would be drafted to include input from Board Members.

Action: Chairman/Director/Deputy Director Finance and Corporate Services

(vi) Mr Doran updated Members regarding PBNI input to the Justice Committee inquiry into Criminal Justice Services available to Victims and Witnesses of Crime.

(vii) Mr Doran advised Members regarding circumstances relating to a murder.

The meeting closed at 1:20pm.