

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 24 APRIL 2020

9.30 AM – WEBEX VIDEO CONFERENCE

420th MEETING – 17th OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE

ATTENDANCE

Mr Dale Ashford, Chair
Mr Neil Bodger
Dr Jonny Byrne
Dr Kelly Clark
Mr Kieran Donaghy
Dr Theresa Donaldson
Mr Paul Douglas
Mrs Judith Gillespie
Ms Patricia Keenan
Mr Max Murray
Mr Dave Wall

Ms Sarah Bruce, Boardroom Apprentice

OFFICIALS

Ms Cheryl Lamont, Chief Executive
Mr, Hugh Hamill, Director of Operations
Dr Geraldine O'Hare, Director of Rehabilitation
Mrs Gillian Robinson, Head of HR
Ms Catherine Teggart, Head of Finance
Ms Gail McGreevy, Head of Communications (Items 1 – 12)
Mr Michael Cox, Board Secretary
Mrs Wendy Rodgers, Secretariat (Minutes)

1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the first Board meeting conducted via video link. He advised members and officials that the Standing Orders allow for meetings to be conducted using this method. He set out the protocol for those members or officials wishing to speak or comment on an item during the meeting.

No potential Conflicts of Interest were declared.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Gearoid OhEara, Member.

3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 21 FEBRUARY 2020 (M03/10)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 21 February 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 28/20)

All actions have been completed. The Board Chair noted that some of the outstanding arrears had been approved in the March salaries and this was welcome. The Board Chair commented that it is important for staff to see that the Board takes these matters seriously.

The Board noted the paper.

5. BOARD CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Board Chair advised that Covid 19 has dominated his time. He and the Chief Executive have had regular telephone calls during which he has been kept up to date on current issues and developments relating to Covid 19. The Board Chair advised that he was very impressed on how the Organisation had responded to the pandemic. He had found that there was calmness and a pragmatic approach by all staff with whom he had contact. He thanked the Chief Executive and her team for their sensible approach and the way they had kept staff informed.

The Board noted the update.

6. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 29/20)

There were four items of correspondence presented to the Board to note

- 6.1 Letter from CEO to J Harrison re: Budget Allocation
- 6.2 Letter from J Harrison to CEO re Budgetary Pressures
- 6.3 Letter from Peter May to CEO on Budget Allocation
- 6.4 Letter from Minister of Justice to CEO on Duncairn Gardens

The Board noted the Correspondence.

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive stated that it had been challenging over the last month and that she was pleased on how the Organisation had moved so swiftly to working in a different way. Members were informed that the Head of HR had been appointed early on as the lead on Covid 19 with the Head of Communications leading on communication. The Chief Executive wished to acknowledge all of the Senior Leadership Team and their work throughout. She also thanked the Board Chair for his support.

The Board noted the update.

8. COVID 19 UPDATE (PAPER 30/20)

The Head of HR provided a comprehensive report on the Covid 19 response, advising on timescales and the guiding principles followed. The Head of HR advised that either she or the Director of Rehabilitation attend a call with wider Justice Family. Staff are kept informed and Mrs Robinson communicates with the Unions at least weekly. The feedback has been positive from both staff and unions on the approach to communication. Gillian Colhoun, Head of IT, has ensured that the Organisation has the capability for staff to work remotely. The Head of Finance is sourcing PPE for staff to allow safe working in the 'Hubs'. The Exit/Recovery Strategy is currently being developed to be ready when it is needed. Members were advised that there has been no diagnoses of the virus among staff to date.

The Head of Communications provided a summary of the timeline of communications, which commenced in January 2020 when the virus first became known. Members were advised of the different platforms used to communicate with staff and the frequency of the updates. Ms McGreevy highlighted a number of significant dates. There was discussion from members on facilitating staff with caring responsibilities; for example, home schooling responsibilities. Mrs Robinson provided information on how HR are viewing remote working.

The Board Chair thanked Mrs Robinson and Ms McGreevy for their comprehensive report and acknowledged that the welfare of staff was very important.

The Board noted the paper.

9. EMPLOYER POLICY ON DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS UNDER NILGOSC REGULATIONS AND THE RETIREMENT POLICY (PAPER 31/20)

The Board Chair advised that members had reviewed this document when the March Board meeting was cancelled due to Covid 19. The Members had agreed to approve this policy at that time.

The Board endorsed its decision to approve this policy.

10. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY (PAPER 32/20)

Ms McGreevy presented the paper to members and advised that there were some minor changes to reflect guidance from the Cabinet Office. The Department of Justice has confirmed that it is content with the policy. Ms McGreevy advised that only members of the Communications Team can post on the official Twitter account and therefore the safeguards are in place. Discussion ensued on how people should be mindful of their privacy and own security on social media.

Following discussion the agreed to approval the Social Media Policy.

11. ESTATES STRATEGY (PAPER 32/20)

The Head of Finance presented the paper to the Board. The Strategy has been prepared for the 2020/23 period. The paper provides information of work completed during 2017/20, it was noted the extensive investment that had been made to the Estate during that time. Ms Teggart took the Members through the work, going forward. She confirmed that 'conditional surveys' are carried out on properties every three years to ensure that the premises are legislatively compliant. There is a sizable amount of work carried out annually on leases and review of 'lease breaks'. A member asked if there had been any development on establishing a new training facility. It was advised that the business case had been started and Ms Teggart is working with the Strategic Investment Board on it. Mrs Robinson and her Department have advised on requirements for the facility. It was agreed that following Covid 19 the Senior Team will need to review the needs of the Organisation with regard to Estates.

The Members agreed that if there were substantial changes made to the Strategy then it should be brought back to the Board.

Following discussion, the Board approved the Estates Strategy.

12. Q4 ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE (PAPER 34/20)

The Director of Rehabilitation presented the paper. The paper shows the outcomes for the year as formulated by the Board having considered the priorities identified in PBNI's Corporate Plan 2017-2020. The Key Outcome(s) for each strategic priority remained constant for each year of the Corporate Plan.

It was advised that the Business Plan 2020/21 will require a reset due to Covid 19 and this will be brought to the June Board. Dr O'Hare asked the Members to note the achievements.

There was discussion on the Sickness Absence levels and it was confirmed that the levels had decreased.

The Board noted the paper

13. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER Q4

The Director of Operations presented the paper. The paper sets out the position as of 31 March 2020. There had been an added risk in quarter 4 due to Covid 19. There were some minor changes for the other risks but nothing significant. The Audit and Risk Management

Group met and was content to recommend approval to the Board. The 2020/21 Strategic Risk Register will be presented to the Board in May 2020.

It was noted that page 5, item 8 the level of risk is to be amended.

Action: Risk level to be amended on item 8 or page 5. (Director of Operations)

Discussion ensued on supporting vulnerable cohorts such as Domestic Abuse and Child Protection. An in-depth discussion took place around capacity for front line staff in regard to the early release of prisoners.

The Board approved Q4 Strategic Risk Register.

14. BUDGET 20/21 SETTLEMENT (PAPER 34/20)

The Head of Finance presented the paper and took the meeting through the paper in detail. It was highlighted that the baseline has been increased by 25%. Discussion ensued on one year budgets instead of the preferred three year cycle. The economy was discussed in light of the Covid 19 and the challenges that this may cause to budgets in the future and the affect it may have on Probation going forward.

The Board Chair thanked Ms Teggart and her staff on behalf of the Board.

The Board approved the paper.

15. FINANCIAL OUTTURN (PAPER 39/20)

Ms Teggart presented the paper and advised that she expects the outturn to be within 1% of the 2019/20 budget. Members were taken through the paper. A member asked how TOIL was managed in the Accounts. Ms Teggart advised that this will be discussed at the ARAC meeting in July and that the management of this was allowed within policies. Mrs Gillespie wished to thank Ms Teggart and her staff for their work on continually coming within the tolerance level for the budget.

The Board noted the paper.

16. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

16.1 Business Continuity Internal Audit Report

Ms Teggart presented the Internal Audit Report on 'Business Continuity'. It was noted that Dr O'Hare was the lead on the audit. It was noted that there were no recommendations made. The Board Chair congratulated Dr O'Hare on the result of the Audit.

The Board noted the paper.

16.2 Audit Control Log

Ms Teggart presented the paper. She advised the Members that outstanding recommendations mainly relate to the current Electronic Case Management System (ECMS). They will be addressed when the replacement ECMS goes live at the end of April. The Head of Internal Audit has indicated that Probation will receive an overall 'satisfactory' assurance for the Annual Report and Accounts. She also confirmed that there would be no Internal Audits in the first quarter of 2020/21.

Ms Teggart is continuing to engage with the External Auditors. The 'travel payments' issue is being addressed.

The Board noted the paper.

17. MANAGAEMENT INFORMATION REPORT

Mrs Robinson advised that the NNC pay remit had been approved and was paid in April. The SCCOG Terms and Conditions remains outstanding, this has been ongoing for two years and needs to be resolved.

Dr O'Hare highlighted some of the statistics as laid out in the paper. It was noted that there had been a slight increase in Orders.

One Serious Further Offence was reported to the Board. Members were advised that a lot of work had been done on this case however an Independent Review will be commissioned.

Mr Hamill advised that the ECMS will go live on 27 April 2020 and processes are in place to support staff. There was further discussion on capacity and protecting the vulnerable. Members were advised of the work being done to service these cohorts. Mr Hamill advised that the core staff do not have spare capacity as contact with lower risk service users is now weekly by telephone. However staff capacity will be looked in the context of pending changes to the Covid 19 interim arrangements guidance.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the wellbeing of staff continues to be pivotal. Capacity of staff will be reviewed in early May.

Ms Teggart advised that the sales of two properties had halted due to Covid 19 and it is hoped that the sales will go through when the legal process can be processed.

Discussion ensued on what could the Board do to help support the staff. The Chief Executive ask if a communique could go to staff from the Board periodically during this period.

Action: Communication to staff to be sent after Board meetings. (Board Chair)

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Board Chair thanked all those who facilitated the meeting. He advised members that the ARAC was due to meet in May but this has been rescheduled to 3 July 2020 and that Ms Teggart is keeping in touch with the Auditors. He also advised that committee meetings will not be held until at least June. The Strategic Risk Register 2020/21 will be brought to the Board in May.

Meeting ended at 11.10 am

D Ashford QFSM
Board Chair

Date