

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 15 MAY 2020**

**9.30 AM – WEBEX VIDEO CONFERENCE**

**421st MEETING – 18<sup>th</sup> OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE**

ATTENDANCE

Mr Dale Ashford, Chair  
Mr Neil Bodger  
Dr Jonny Byrne  
Mr Kieran Donaghy  
Dr Theresa Donaldson  
Mr Paul Douglas  
Mrs Judith Gillespie  
Ms Patricia Keenan  
Mr Max Murray  
Mr G OhEara  
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 – 9)  
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 second Board meeting conducted via video conferencing. He set out the protocol for those members or officials wishing to speak or comment on an item during the meeting. It is expected that this will be the method of conducting meetings for the foreseeable future.

No potential Conflicts of Interest were declared.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Dr K Clark, Member.

**3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 24 APRIL 2020 (M04/10)**

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 24 April 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record with one minor amendment.

#### 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 41/20)

All actions have been completed.

The Board noted the paper.

#### 5. BOARD CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Board Chair advised that 'Covid 19' issues continue to dominate his time. He and the Chief Executive have had regular telephone calls during which she has kept him up to date on current and emerging issues relating to the pandemic. The Board Chair advised that he had been in contact with the Department about whether the Corporate Plan 2020/23 should be revised to reflect current circumstances. The Department confirmed that the delay on Ministerial approval was on their part but that the Plan had now gone to the Minister for approval. It was suggested that the impact of the pandemic should be reflected in this year's Business Plan. There were no suggested changes by members. The Board Chair commented that the Business Plan must reflect the current reality and therefore the revised Business Plan will be presented to the June Board for approval. The Committee Chairs' Working Group will meet after the June Board meeting. It was confirmed that the Corporate Resources Committee meeting will go ahead as scheduled on 23 June 2020. The Board Chair also advised that the DOF had put a hold on the implementation of the Partnership Agreements due to the pandemic.

The Board noted the update.

#### 6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive advised members of the revised timetable for the completion of the CJINI's Inspection of Probation. A verbal update will be provided after a forthcoming meeting with CJINI at the June Board.. The Report is likely to be published later this year. CJINI had confirmed that Covid 19 had affected their work.

In response to a member's question on the Strategic Governance part of the inspection, the Board Chair advised that the Inspectors had spoken to the Committee Chairs' Working Group, which was followed up with requested paperwork.

**Action: A verbal update on the CJINI Inspection will be provided to the June Board. (Chief Executive/Director of Operations)**

The Chief Executive advised that she had attended the first Senior Civil Servants Forum (SCS) since the outbreak of Covid 19. Members were briefed on the main points made by Mr Peter May, DOJ Permanent Secretary. It was advised that all key services within Justice were being delivered. The DOJ will also be reviewing and revising its Business Plan.

It was also reported that Deborah Brown, DOJ, has an exercise underway to assess the financial position because of the actions taken on Covid 19. It is likely that in-year savings may be sought. The Chief Executive noted her concern on what this might mean.

Mr May had advised of two critical points that should be included in any Recovery Plan: firstly, to ensure that the Unions are constructively engaged and, secondly, staff wellbeing must be a prime consideration. Mr May also advised that he will be communicating with all ALBs soon.

The Director of Rehabilitation, Dr O'Hare, advised members that monitoring of arrangements for early release were continuing.

The Board noted the update.

## 7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 42/20)

There was one item of correspondence presented to the Board to note

7.1 Letter received by Board Chair from the Minister of Justice on the positive work by Probation's Leadership Team and Staff

The Board noted the correspondence.

## 8. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER 2020/21 (SRR) (PAPER 43/20)

Mr Hamill presented the paper to members. He advised that the risk related to PIMS was removed from the register as the new Electronic Case Management System (ECMS) became operational on 27 April 2020. Risk 2 was revised to reflect a greater focus on budgetary issues. The rating for Risk 5 has been reduced to medium because of the payment of arrears, which has reduced the imminent threat of industrial action. Minor changes were made to the other risks.

The SRR (Q1) will have seven risks; one of which has a red rating. The SRR will be updated at the end of June.

There was discussion on Covid 19 and the impact this has had on Community Service Orders. Mr Hamill advised that CSOs could not take place until all Health & Safety obligations by PBNi and the CS providers are met.

Mr Bodger asked about funding of Programmes and Projects in light of the Covid 19 pressures. It was advised that funding has been received for the year. It was suggested that the inherent risk should be 'red' and keep the residual risk be 'yellow'. Following discussion this was agreed, that the potential budgetary impact of Covid 19, in terms of public spending, should be added as an emerging risk.

**Action: Budgetary impact of Covid 19 to be added as an emerging risk to the SRR. (Director of Operations)**

The Board approved the paper.

## 9. COVID 19 UPDATE (PAPER 44/20)

The Head of HR introduced the update on Covid 19 since the April Board Meeting. Since the paper was written, there are now 3 members of staff isolating. As Probation staff are essential workers, they can self-refer to be tested for the Covid. The Unions are fully engaged and the feedback from staff on communications continues to be positive. Probation will follow the Executive's Five Step Plan closely. The Task and Finish Working Group, led by Mr Hamill, is considering the means upon which staff can return to work on a gradual phased basis and the associated the Health and Safety requirements for staff returning to the workplace are of paramount concern.

The Head of Communications provided members with information on all the means being used to communicate both internally and externally. Information was provided to staff on wellbeing and nutrition. Video diaries are being kept by staff and shown on line. The Board Chair drew attention to the podcasts that the Chief Executive had recorded for staff. He suggested that these should be made available to Board Members, if possible.

Information was provided on how service users are engaging with staff, most obviously through telephone calls instead of face-to-face meetings. Mr Hamill informed members that there were no concerns about hostels with no cases of Covid reported in the approved premises.

The Board noted the paper.

#### **10. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER (PAPER 45/20)**

Mr Hamill advised that, since the paper had been prepared, there had been one Serious Further Offence committed. Members were given details of the case and that the offender was known to Probation.

Mrs Robinson advised that the NNC pay remit had been approved by the DOJ and implemented in April. The SCCOG pay remit remains outstanding; the Head of Finance is requesting updates each week. It has been advised that the Business Case is now with DOF.

Mrs Robinson presented two papers on Sickness Absence, the Annual 2019/20 Report and April 2020 Report. The Members discussed both reports in detail. The impact of homeworking was also discussed and the measures required when staff return to the workplace.

Ms Teggart advised that the sales of Crawford Square and Antrim Road properties are on hold due to the pandemic but she understands that both purchasers are still interested in the properties. The Business Case for Richmond Chambers has been approved. Work continues on the Estate Strategy remotely with business cases being prepared for the Newtownards premises and the proposed Training facility.

Mr Hamill provided an update on the Electronic Case Management System (ECMS). The system went live on 27 April 2020 and the feedback from staff is good. 'Super users' remain available to help staff with any issues. Phase 2 has been delayed due to the current circumstances and the company (Equiniti) is to provide a revised timeline.

Dr O'Hare provided an update on statistics. A discussion ensued on the patterns of crime and how this has changed in the current lockdown situation. Dr O'Hare also updated members on Communication and Engagement. Probation are currently drafting a response to one consultation (Ministry of Justice's 'Victims Code' Consultation), which will be approved and sent before the closing date of 30 May 2020.

The Board noted the paper

#### **11. UPDATE ON ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS (VERBAL)**

The Head of Finance, Ms Teggart, provided a verbal update on the preparation of the Annual Report and Accounts. The DOF has pushed back the laying of the Accounts by two months. The ARAC will meet on 3 July 2020 to review the draft report. The outturn for 2019/20 is within £180k equating to about 0.9% of the budget. All journals have been posted and the books are now closed. The next step is for the Auditors to carry out their work.

Members congratulated Ms Teggart for coming within 0.9% of budget.

The Board noted the update.

## 12. FINANCIAL OUTTURN (VERBAL)

Ms Teggart advised that April figures are not yet available due to the work preparing the Annual Report and Accounts. She provided information on the Covid pressures with the cost being estimated at £780k for this financial year. There are concerns on pressures and that in-year savings may be sought.

Ms Teggart also provided an update on the capital budget. It starts each year at zero. This year, however, there is a pressure arising from the delays in implementing the ECMS. The Department is aware of it and the fact that it is a contractual commitment. Probation has received two thirds of the monies required but there is still a shortfall, which the Department recognized as a priority pressure.

The Board noted the paper.

## 13. GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN (PAPER 46/20)

The Board Secretary introduced the paper. The paper is a situation report on the actions agreed at the Board's Development Day meeting held in August 2019. Due to the current circumstances, some of the actions may need to be revised.

The Board noted the paper.

## 14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### 14.1 Board Schedule 2020/21 (Paper 47/20)

The Board Chair presented a paper on planned meeting dates for the coming year. It is noted that dates are subject to change due to the pandemic. If more meetings are required, they can be scheduled into the timetable.

14.2 Mr Wall, Chair of the Policy and Practice Committee, noted that the next PPC meeting is scheduled for August, which would be six months since the last meeting because of the pandemic. This length between meetings was a concern as there were items that he would wish to be updated on. The Board Chair advised that the current schedule meets the requirements in the Standing Orders but additional meetings could be called, if required. A decision could be taken after the June Board, when the revised Business Plan will be considered. Mr Wall agree with this arrangement. The Chief Executive advised that that the Business Plan will be presented at June Board and this could bring forward any pressing items.

The Board Chair thanked members and officials for attending the meeting.

Meeting ended at 11.15 am

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D Ashford QFSM  
Board Chair

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Date