

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BOARD MEETING – FRIDAY 24 JULY 2020

9.30 AM – WEBEX VIDEO CONFERENCE

423th MEETING – 20th OF THE TWELFTH TERM OF OFFICE

ATTENDANCE

Mr Dale Ashford, Chair
Mr Neil Bodger
Mr Kieran Donaghy
Dr Theresa Donaldson (Items 8 – 18)
Mr Paul Douglas
Mrs Judith Gillespie
Ms Patricia Keenan
Mr Max Murray
Mr G OhEara
Mr Dave Wall

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 Joyce Mercer, DP Statistician (Item 10)
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 Board meeting, which continues to be conducted via video conferencing. He commented that the Board does not normally meet in July but due to Covid it was necessary to meet and he thanked members and officials for attending this extra meeting.

The Board Chair congratulated Mrs Gillespie on her appointment as Independent Chair of the Magdalene Laundries working group, which is a group, set up by Stormont to investigate historical abuse.

The Board Chair also congratulated Mrs Robinson on her Ministerial appointment to review the Support Services for NIPS staff suffering from mental health issues.

There will be a closed session for members after this meeting.

No potential Conflicts of Interest were declared.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Dr J Byrne, Member; Dr K Clark, Member; Ms Sarah Bruce, Boardroom Apprentice and Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications.

3. MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON THE 19 JUNE 2020 (M06/10)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Friday 19 June 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (PAPER 55/20)

All actions have been completed. Action 2, the Board Chair advised members that the Recovery Plan has been uploaded onto Decision Time but if any member wished to receive a copy before the return of the Board tablets then Mrs Rodgers can forward a copy.

The Board noted the paper.

5. BOARD CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Board Chair advised that recovery from 'Covid 19' continues to gather momentum. After the June Board the Committee Chairs Working Group met and the notes will be forwarded to members when available.

The Board Chair advised that he had attended both the CRC and PPC meetings in June.

He held a meeting with the Trade Unions on 1 July 2020, which was positive. The Unions were particularly pleased with the flow of communications to staff throughout the Covid period. He commended the Senior Team for this. He also had a meeting with Julie Harrison, Director of Safer Communities where the position of Deputy Chair to the Board was discussed. The appointment process will proceed in the near future.

The Board Chair proposed to invite Dr Harrison to attend the Board in either September or October. The Members agreed to this.

Action: The Board Chair to write to Dr Harrison to invited to attend a Board meeting. (Board Chair)

With recovery from lockdown continuing, the Board Chair advised that he is now meeting with the Chief Executive face to face.

The incoming Boardroom Apprentice is Ms Jessica Anderson and Ms Keenan has agreed to continue to act as the 'Board Buddy'. Ms Anderson's first meeting will be September.

Mr Wall raised a question on mental health of young people working from home and the feeling of isolation. Mrs Robinson, Head of HR, advised on Probation's experience and commented that it was more caring and home schooling responsibilities that have caused anxiety for some staff.

The Board noted the update.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive wished to record her, and the Senior Team's, congratulation to Mrs Gillespie on her appointment. She also wished to record her congratulations to Mrs Robinson on her Ministerial appointment.

The Chief Executive asked Dr O'Hare, Director of Rehabilitation, to update members on Brexit. Dr O'Hare advised that she had attended a DOJ meeting on 1 July 2020. Covid has been a distraction but as a 'no deal' Brexit is now more likely, the Department is working on a new draft plan. Dr O'Hare will update members at the August Board. Mr Graham Walker attended the Board previously to update members on Brexit and he is due to attend the October Board when he will provide a further update. Following a question from a member on criminals crossing borders, the Director of Rehabilitation advised that there would be more clarity from Mr Walker in October.

The Board noted the update.

7. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER 56/20)

There were two items of correspondence presented to the Board to note.

- 7.1 Letter received by the Chief Executive from Sue Gray, Review of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)
- 7.2 Letter received by the Chief Executive from Lindsay McCormick New Decade New Approach: Review of Arm's-Length Bodies

Members were advised that PBNI's return was included in the papers for their information. The Chief Executive commented that the response was at very short notice but the response did meet the deadline. The Board will be kept informed of developments.

The Board noted the correspondence.

8. TPMO UPDATE – DRAFT INTERIM MULTI-AGENCY REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS (PAPER 57/20)

The Chief Executive introduced the paper and thanked the Board for taking the paper at short notice, not least because of the complexities and sensitivity of the subject matter. The Board will be asked for its approval to the proposed approach in due course.

The Chief Executive invited Mr Hamill, Director of Operations, to take the Members through the paper, Mr Hamill provided background to the current approach and the proposed MARA transitional arrangements. The latter arrangements are required to be in place prior to the move to the next stage, of a legislative change proposal. Mrs Robinson provided information on the Unions' perspective.

Discussion ensued on the risk to Probation staff around this aspect of delivering its statutory duty. The Director of Operations advised that Probation will always provide assistance on resettlement and wellbeing if requested by any offender on a voluntary basis and with full consent. The Board had a full and detailed discussion on the paper and agreed to approve the paper.

The Board Chair welcomed the paper and that it placed Probation in its best position since the legislation was introduced in 2010.

The Board approved the paper.

9. COVID 19 UPDATE (VERBAL)

Mrs Robinson provided an update and advised that communications continue to be sent to staff across the Organisation. Senior staff continue to meet every Monday to discuss

any issues and the way forward. The Recovery Plan started on 20 July 2020 and seems to be working well. Mr Hamill leads the Task and Finish Group and he will be reviewing the process of recovery at the end of each stage. Signage and PPE are in place and staff appear to be pleased to be returning to the offices. The Unions have been particularly complementary around the communication that staff are receiving, Mrs Robinson advised that no staff have been diagnosed or are self-isolating.

Mr Hamill advised members in respect of resuming face to face contact with service users. He also advised that all PBNi offices in the community re-opened on 20 July 2020.

The Board noted the update.

10. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PAPER (PAPER 58/20)

The Board Chair welcomed Ms Mercer, DP Statistician, to the meeting.

Ms Mercer took the Members through the statistical information provided in the paper, highlighting a number of points. There is a 1% increase in caseload compared to the 31 March 2019. There is a 12% increase of females on the caseload since March 2016. There is an increase in offenders aged 40 or above.

Dr O'Hare advised that prison is still the most commonly used disposal by courts. There was discussion on the increase of female offenders and the possible links to poverty and social change. It was agreed that research in this area would be useful. Social isolation for offenders was also discussed.

The narrative around the statistics was discussed and how this would provide a greater understanding. There was discussion on the increasing number of victim registrations and the category of victims, who tend to register.

Mr Hamill advised that since the paper was circulated there has been one Serious Further Offence. He briefed the Members on the case.

Mr Hamill advised Board on the IT update, as per the commentary in the Management of Information paper.

Mrs Robinson updated the Members on the pay negotiations with the Unions. She provided background into their claim and explained the DOF and DOJ position. She has asked the Unions to come back with their proposals. The Unions have mentioned the possibility of industrial action if their pay claim is not met. There is no further update on NILGOSC. Discussion ensued on the risk of Probation having lower pay rates in a competitive job market. Mrs Robinson advised that the risk will be revised back to 'high'. She advised that she will be providing a robust business case to support the pay claim.

Ms Teggart, Head of Finance, provided an update on Estates as laid out in the paper.

The Board noted the paper.

11. BOARD WORK PLAN (PAPER 59/20)

Mr Cox, the Board Secretary, introduced the paper showing the scheduled work for the Committees and the Board. The document shows the flow of work and therefore it is important that it is accurate. He asked for the work plan to be reviewed at the next Committee meetings to ensure it is accurate and inform him of any amendments.

The Board noted the paper.

12. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE – AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC) (VERBAL)

Mr Bodger, Committee Chair, provided the Board with a summary of the ARAC meeting held on 3 July 2020. Members were advised that the Internal Audit Opinion for 2019/20 was a 'satisfactory' assurance level. Mr Bodger asked for congratulations to be passed to the staff. The Draft Annual Report and Accounts was presented to the Committee but no comment was required at that time.

Mr Bodger advised that he had suggested scenario planning for the Strategic Risks over 3 and 6 months and 1, 2 and 5 years. He had discussed this suggestion with the Board Chair and the Board Chair had agreed that a discussion on Risk could form part of the Board Planning day.

The Board noted the update.

13. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS (PAPER 60/20)

Ms Teggart, Head of Finance, presented the Draft Annual Report and Accounts to members. Members were advised that the draft had been discussed in detail at the ARAC on 3 July 2020. There are some disclosures outstanding. The Accounts have come in at 0.9% underspend of budget. Expenditure on Covid and Brexit will continue to be monitored. The Auditors will be looking at internal controls. The ARAC will be looking at the Accounts in detail at its meeting on 6 August 2020 together with the report to those Charged with Governance. Ms Teggart advised that no issues have been raised to date.

The Annual Report and Accounts will be brought to the Board in August for formal approval.

The Board noted the paper.

14. PENSION VALUATION 2019/20 (PAPER 61/20)

Ms Teggart advised that the liability had increased by 70% this year. This was mainly due to the financial markets being adversely affected by Covid with the value of investments falling at the time of the assessment. If the valuation had been done in either January or February the liability would have been less before the markets fell. The External Auditors will be looking at this to ensure that it is reflected appropriately in the accounts.

The Board noted the paper.

15. FINANCIAL OUTTURN (PAPER 62/20)

Ms Teggart presented the June Outturn to the Board and highlighted a number of points. There has been a slight underspend in June. Ms Teggart advised that monies for 'Fresh Start' and Covid have been received in the June Monitoring Round. Capital monies have not yet been allocated, which will be considered in the October Spending Round. Prompt payment continues to be within targets.

The Board noted the update.

16. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE - POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE (PPC) (VERBAL)

Mr Wall, Committee Chair, provided members with a summary of the PPC held on 26 June 2020. The Committee will be looking at the increase in female and older aged offenders at its meeting in August. The Business Plan and Strategic Risks were also discussed. Two Reports were presented discussed and noted at PPC; 1 Report on Death Under Supervision and, 2 The Annual Serious Further Offences Report. The Communication Strategy was discussed by the Committee and will be coming to the Board in August for approval. The Complaints Policy is being presented to this meeting for approval. The format and timing of the Annual Seminar was discussed. It was suggested that it could be a webinar on Domestic Abuse.

Mr Wall asked the Board to consider approving the quorum for PPC to be set at 2 as there are currently 4 members. It was also asked that when the Board Chair attends a committee meeting that he be treated as a member. There is a precedent for a quorum being set at 2 by the ARAC.

The Board approved that the quorum for PPC should be 2 and the Board Chair will be counted as a member.

The Board noted the update.

17. COMPLAINTS POLICY (PAPER 63/20)

Mr Wall advised that the PPC had reviewed the Complaints Policy at its meeting on 26 June 2020 and agreed to recommend approval to the Board.

Dr O'Hare presented the Policy to the Board and provided a summary of it. She advised that the Policy had only minor changes. In response to a member's question on the review cycle, it was advised that the review cycle for policies has moved from 3 years to 4 years.

Following discussion the Board agreed to approve the Complaints Policy.

18. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE – CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE (CRC) (VERBAL)

Mrs Gillespie, Committee Chair, provided a summary of the CRC meeting held on 23 June 2020. Members were advised that the Executive Team has covered much of the Committee's business during this meeting. The Strategic Risks 3 and 4 were discussed as was the issue of the pay claim and the competitive pay market for Social Workers. The negative impact of one-year budgets has continued to be a recurring theme. The roll out of the ECMS is going well with the second phase being completed by 30 November 2020. It was suggested that the Committee-led Board meeting should be on People Strategy. The Committee will prepare for this at its October meeting. Board tablets will be returned to members in the near future.

The Board noted the update.

19. OTHER BUSINESS

The Board Chair thanked members and officials for attending the meeting. The next meeting will be on 21 August 2020 via WebEx.

Meeting ended at 12 noon.

D Ashford QFSM
Board Chair

Date _____