

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 9am on 13th December 2022

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Margaret McCabe, Dr. Eddie Molloy*, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Ms. Fiona Quinn*, Ms. Yvonne Cooke*, Ms. Anne Marie Hoey*, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports for the Board

Operational Report

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report (and the supporting papers), which were circulated in advance of the meeting.

The CEO discussed the recruitment delivery targets and informed the Board that recruitment timescales year to date were at 69% overall, with the Local Authority sector at 79%; P&T at 68%; Medical Consultants at 72%; and State Boards at 64%. The CEO noted that SER remains lower at 55%, but it is improving slowly; and the General Grade Assignments remain a significant concern, at 21%.

The CEO updated the Board on the Future of Work and return to Chapter House, including the launch of the PAS Hybrid Working Policy on 21st November. She outlined how the policy now gives PAS a framework that supports both staff and the organisation to maximise the potential of hybrid working. She noted that it was designed in collaboration with representatives from across the organisation, the Future of Work Group and our Partnership Committee, and that staff have been asked to submit applications for once they have completed a remote health and safety assessment of their home workstation. The CEO informed the Board that PAS has been trying to progress the Chapter House renovation project and increase staff access to office facilities, with staff continuing to attend the office for one team anchor day per week and a flexible second day in line with the availability of office space on the third floor in Chapter House. It was noted that once the second floor becomes available, staff will attend the office for two days per week, with an option to attend for additional days in line with business needs.

The CEO provided the Board with an update on Project Nova, noting that the Project Team and OGP have concluded the evaluation for stage one of the procurement process, and four suppliers have now been invited to stage two. She advised the Board that the Project Team are working on developing the Invitation to Tender. The Board welcomed the interest from four suppliers, and the CEO agreed that timelines would be kept as tight as possible.

In relation to the Chapter House Project, the CEO informed the Board that a new electrical contractor had been appointed and outstanding works have already commenced on the second floor (and that it is expected that these works will be concluded before the end of the

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year). The CEO noted that the first six interview suites have commenced audio visual equipment installation and another two suites are due for install this year. She informed the Board that the remaining interview suites and meeting rooms will be completed early 2023 however, supply chain issues, particularly in respect of meeting rooms and innovation spaces, remain, and these timelines are based on anticipated delivery times.

The CEO provided an update on the Public Sector Recruiter Network, a meeting of which was taking place on 13th December, with a focus is on Best Practice in Talent Attraction. The CEO noted that the session would include an overview of public sector recruitment provided by the PAS Marketing team to highlight best practice in driving talent attraction; with Donal Mulligan, from the OECD, exploring recruiting a workforce for the future. It was noted that Donal O'Donoghue, President of the Employment and Recruitment Federation, would then also discuss 2022 hiring trends in the Irish market.

The CEO informed the Board that the dedicated online hub for medical consultant roles has been launched in partnership with the HSE, with medical consultant roles now available in one easy to access online hub. The HSE nominee on the Board agreed that it was a good site and that it was good to get this joint project over the line.

The CEO informed the Board that *The Pitch* beat off stiff competition from significant marketing campaigns to win gold for the Best Native Campaign 2022 at the annual Digital Media Awards in November. The CEO noted that this was an excellent achievement for the post-primary school's initiative with an authentic digital campaign that tactically helped to drive this strategic project forward, creating awareness and engagement around public sector career opportunities. The Board agreed that this was a good project with positive feedback being received on it.

The CEO provided an update to the Board in relation to the previous action in regard to benchmarking selection board member payments, noting that most public sector bodies appear to use DPER agreed rates, and a different approach is being adopted in the private sector and the public sector in the UK. The Board discussed the issues raised around selection board member payments potentially impacting on the supply and reliability of selection board members. It was agreed that a further paper would be submitted to DPER on this matter, with any supporting data available to PAS, including any linkages with consultant fees in general, and that this paper would be copied to the Board and put on the agenda for the next meeting.

The Board noted the new approach to IT recruitment, as outlined in the Operational Report, and welcomed this. They also agreed that they would be interested in receiving a presentation at the next Board meeting on the new Capability Model.

Risk Management

The CEO noted that the ongoing issues in relation to Service Delivery Timescales were discussed by the Board at the last meeting and an update on delivery in terms of SER would be provided later in the Board meeting as the Key Risk area. She informed the Board that the IT team presented on Cyber Security at the December Audit Committee meeting and that the Committee was assured by this report.

The CEO provided an update on one of the legal cases included in the risk papers. It was agreed that PAS would consider any legal advice and would continue to adopt a person-centric approach to this case, and the Board supported the request for mediation.

One of the Board Members raised an issue in relation to video interviews and whether the paper applications are assessed as part of this process, and form part of the final score for this assessment. The CEO agreed to discuss this with the Head of Assessment Services.

Financial Position

A verbal update was provided on finances due to a bereavement. The Board passed on its commiserations to the staff member on her loss.

The Board noted that PAS would come in under budget and would utilise the supplementary received. It was noted that no significant issues have been identified with client invoices this year.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting and the Reports on Quality Controls in Recruitment and Clearance, and Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery, which had been included in the Board papers. The Board representative on the Audit Committee noted some disappointment with the standardisation process still not being embedded across all recruitment teams and that the overall manual was not signed off. The Board noted that specific actions, and delivery dates, had been agreed. It was noted that the Committee also had some concerns in relation to disaster recovery testing but again welcomed that this will be actioned quickly.

It was noted that the Committee is very satisfied with Mazars. The Board representative on the Audit Committee noted a concern that the Audit Committee now had a majority of former/current public servants on it. The CEO informed the Board that she had been considering this based on the feedback from the Committee meeting and would be appointing an additional private sector member to the Committee, if a suitable Committee member could be identified.

Update on the Key Risk Area – Meeting Demand for SER Campaigns

Michelle Noone made a presentation to the Board on this key risk area. Ciaran Oman, Sandra Cairns and Eimear O'Connor also joined the Board for this topic. The Board noted that the presentation was very useful and highlighted the volume of work in this area.

It was noted that the time to advertising should be reflected in the KPIs and any opportunities to reduce this should be considered, in addition to opportunities to reduce the end-to-end timelines, including engagement at a senior level with clients around their role in the process and the expectations of PAS in terms of the documentation and support needed to ensure the process runs as quickly as possible.

The Board discussed the volume of non-core work and noted that it included significant high-profile campaigns which it was in the public interest for PAS to manage and where PAS had significant expertise to bring to a sensitive recruitment process. Michelle informed the Board that PAS does not take on all non-core work that it is requested to, and that the decision is based on capacity and how critical the posts are in the national interest, and the alternative options available to clients. It was noted that PAS had turned down a significant number of requests but provided other supports to clients when doing this.

It was noted that this volume of work from all sectors is likely to continue and PAS would need to consider the reputational risks involved in not meeting the KPIs in this area, and

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consider how best it can meet peak demands, including reviewing all processes and examining any scope for automation.

It was agreed that PAS should look at the resources needed in this area and noted the improvements in delivery in other areas when additional resources were provided. It was noted that PAS has limited resources in terms of finances and staffing, and therefore has limited opportunity to flex to meet peaks in demands.

It was noted that the ongoing review of TLAC may also assist in reducing timelines in this area.

Discussion on Service Delivery (focusing on SER and General Service)

Michelle Noone, Ciaran Oman, Sandra Cairns, Eimear O'Connor and Sinead Coleman* also joined the Board for this topic. Ciaran and Eimear made a presentation to the Board including some key data relevant to the discussion.

The Board discussed the high attrition rates, and it was noted that different approaches have been trialed to ensure only those with a real interest in the particular post are applying. It was noted that the virtual recruitment process is making it easier to apply, which may be impacting on attrition rates, and there is also the general impact of the current recruitment market.

The demands for clerical staff in both Dublin and the regions was discussed, as was the significant burden on PAS in filling small numbers of vacancies in specific regions, and also filling short-term temporary contracts nationwide. The approaches being adopted to regional recruitment were discussed, and it was noted that this was of critical importance to clients and many of them would not have the capacity to carry out this level of recruitment themselves. The issues in relation to TCO contracts was also discussed as was the progress from TCO to CO. It was noted that the lack of workforce planning by some clients was having a significant impact on the ability of PAS to deliver in this area, as is the fact that PAS cannot provide specifics to each individual candidate about the potential roles on offer. The Board noted that ongoing high levels of demand for clerical staff and questioned whether it should be so high with the ongoing developments around automation and digitalisation across the civil service but acknowledged that there have been significant population increases and the requirement to respond to a number of crises. It was noted that DPER would be focusing again on strategic workforce planning and identifying future skills. It was also noted that the CSMB People Sub-Group has been re-constituted and that they would have a significant role to play in this area.

It was noted that ASU are engaging with DPER in relation to implementing the new Capability Model and that elements of this will be introduced as soon as possible.

Update on ED&I Project

Siobhan McKenna and Ciaran Oman made a presentation to the Board on the Equality Monitoring Dashboard Project. It was agreed that consideration should be given to the supporting material to be provided when rolling out these findings. It was noted that this data needs to be collected by HR units also in order to have a full picture across the civil service. The Board noted that PAS will be hosting an ED&I event in March (to which the Board would be invited) and external speakers are also being identified who can discuss best practice approaches in this area, from data collection to actions. It was agreed that the original chart

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in the slides would be amended to include the PAS statistics for each of the areas. It was agreed that this was a critical project, with the findings validating the PAS processes and also identifying gaps in relation to groups not applying for roles. The Board agreed that this project highlights an important agenda for the wider system and that the next steps are key.

Siobhan informed the Board that PAS has submitted a paper to DPER on widening eligibility requirements in terms of citizenship and that this is under consideration. It was agreed that a positive response to this paper would help PAS attract more talent and increase the diversity of the applicant pool.

Next meeting

The Chairman agreed to revert in relation to suitable dates for meetings in 2023 and the Board will then be contacted to ascertain their availability.