

## **Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 10am on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

**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).

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The Board congratulated Colin on his recent promotion and welcomed the fact that he would remain on the PAS Board in his new role.

The Board also congratulated Siobhan McKenna on her recent CIPD award.

### **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 in 2022 were at 73% overall, with the Local Authority sector at 80%; P&T at 73%; Medical Consultants at 74%; and State Boards at 71%. The CEO noted that SER remains lower at 55%, and the General Grade Assignments remain at 29%, with both of these areas being of significant concern.

It was noted that activity levels in January were high – in comparison to same time in 2022; 51 campaigns were advertised, up from 30 in January 2022; 3,387 assessments were completed, up from 453 in January 2022; 1,755 interviews were held, up from 1,267 in January 2022; and 641 assignments were made, up from 618 in January 2022. It was noted that 700 requests to fill vacancies were received in January so demands remain extremely high.

The CEO informed the Board that PAS is actively working to try and address the backlogs in SER and general service clearance and assignments and were also taking into consideration the significant pipelines already emerging in January. It was noted that the backlog was impacting both the reputation of PAS and staff morale. She informed the Board that a resourcing paper had been submitted to D/PER as suggested by the Board, with requests for temporary and longer term resources, with these resources being used to clear the backlog and implement recommendations from the upcoming TLAC Review Report. She informed the Board that additional APs had been appointed to both areas (including a merger of State Boards and SER), additional staff have been sourced from clients, and Temporary Clerical Officers have been recruited to increase the resources in these key areas. It was noted that the new Clearance and Assignments AP will work closely with Data

Analytics and CRM to streamline the process as much as possible with a view to achieving the agreed timescales for delivery in 2023. The Board noted that the paper to D/PER has now been referred to the Votes area, and PAS would be engaging with them on this matter, in addition to engaging with the AGS and D/PER around a transfer of funding to support increased Garda Trainee recruitment.

The Board suggested that PAS consider an assessment of resource capability to ensure that PAS is adequately resourced to achieve what is expected, and Yvonne offered to provide advice to PAS on this matter.

The Board also asked that PAS assess productivity in 2019 in comparison to 2022/3 and prepare a summary document as to any differences between both time periods, both at a macro level and within PAS. This would include the previous data presented on the recruitment market challenges, the significantly higher attrition rates, the increasing volume of requests, and the need for multiple campaigns to deliver the required results. It was suggested that the increased level of internal mobility in the civil service was one of the factors impacting on PAS, with additional resources required to fill the gaps. The CEO noted the opportunities for the additional uses for robotics which have been identified and assured the Board that PAS have been constantly looking at different ways to increase productivity and to identify efficiencies. The Board noted that staff have had to be trained and supported to deliver through Covid and have also been called upon to input into consultation around key strategic projects and accepted that this was necessary and would be likely to result in pay-off in terms of future productivity. It was agreed that any data on this would also feed into the summary document. It was also recognised that staff are supporting a key digital project, and this is also time consuming, in addition to delivering the major Chapter House project during Covid. The Board noted that the turnover rate in PAS is quite high and recognised that this would impact on productivity, with increased training time. The Board agreed that it would be useful to have more data on the drivers of the increased request rate and any factors impacting on the filling of posts and on productivity overall. The Board also agreed that the summary could include additional information on the backlogs and the measures being implemented to reduce them.

The Board offered their support to the Management Board to de-prioritise non-essential work over the coming months in order to clear the backlog. While recognising that all of the work underway is key, it was recognised that it may be necessary to slow down the delivery on some key strategic and operational areas in order to divert more resources to address the backlog. The Board suggested that PAS examine the possibility of adopting a 12 week project type focus on this backlog across PAS, utilising whatever resources can be made available, and using other options, such as overtime, or taking a blitz approach. The Board agreed that they would support any new approaches adopted to deal with the backlog. The Board agreed that D/PER should be kept informed in relation to any significant re-prioritisation decided at Management Board. It was noted that any projects going to Management Board for approval should include data on the resources needed to deliver and significant attention should be paid to this before additional projects are approved.

The CEO updated the Board on some organisational highlights since the last meeting. These included the ICT Apprenticeship competition which proved very successful, and engagement with the OGCIO to launch a new initiative for current civil servants to move into ICT roles. The CEO also highlighted the new TCO competition which is underway and the plans for a TCO Ukraine. The CEO noted that the AO competition was launched in January for specialist streams and that the Senior Executive Officer national competition is in planning, with a new selection process designed. The CEO updated the Board on the Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme (HAFH), a Slaintecare funded programme, which is underway with the Local Authorities. The Board noted that PAS is dealing with a large

volume of campaigns for Medical Consultant and Local Authorities and that PAS is meeting agreed deadlines for the majority of these campaigns.

The CEO informed the Board that the Office Neighbourhoods system was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> February, to coincide with the opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, with onsite attendance and desk capacity managed locally within teams and Neighbourhoods. It was noted that a number of supports have been put in place to assist with this (which were communicated at Town Hall meetings and briefing sessions).

The CEO provided a short update on the three key strategic projects. It was noted that the Nova project team is working with Grant Thornton, the OGP, and CSSO to update the functional, non-functional, technical, data, and GDPR sections of the Invitation to Tender (ITT), which is due to issue at the end of March. The CEO updated the Board on the Chapter House project, with construction works completed before the end of 2022 and all staff areas now open. She noted that some snagging items remain which should be resolved soon, and the AV equipment installation and commissioning is expected to be fully completed in the coming weeks.

In relation to the ED&I project, the CEO informed the Board that the PAS proposal to the Innovation Fund around re-imagining and redesigning RA in recruitment (in partnership with Local HR, universal/creative design experts, candidates and clients) has been approved, with PAS allocated €45k in matched funding. The Board welcomed the upcoming *You Count* – ED&I Conference on March 14<sup>th</sup>; it was noted that the purpose of this event is to highlight and discuss the power of data to drive change and help to build a more diverse and inclusive public service workforce, and that there will be both internal and external contributions.

The Board requested that PAS review the level of detail in the Operations Report. They suggested that the slippage in timelines on Nova should be in the CEO's report in addition to the Nova Report. The Board also reiterated the need to progress the customer engagement project so that feedback can be obtained from all customer groups on an ongoing basis.

### Risk Management

The CEO updated the Board on some key risk areas. She noted that the Garda Trainee competition is in the planning stages and is due to be advertised 24<sup>th</sup> March 2023, and that PAS is in ongoing discussions with the AGS in relation to eligibility for this campaign, recognising that PAS is running this campaign on behalf of the AGS and Minister for Justice.

The CEO informed the Board that PAS received its first protected disclosure (from an applicant) which included a report alleging cheating across a number of public sector recruitment competitions. It was noted that investigations are ongoing in relation to this matter and may take some time to complete, but that a preventative action was identified to mitigate against any impact of this on ongoing recruitment competitions.

The CEO updated the Board on a legal case where Judicial Review proceedings had been taken against PAS and a public service employer; PAS and the employer entered into mediation which commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> January and was completed in February. It was noted that agreement was reached with a number of actions for the employer, and PAS and the employer had agreed to pay some of the other party's legal costs as part of the settlement.

In relation to actions agreed at the previous meeting, the CEO informed the Board that she had discussed video interview process with the Head of ASU and she informed the Board that paper applications are assessed as part of this process, and form part of the final score for this assessment. The Board agreed that there is an independent appeals process that all

candidates can utilise if they are unhappy with a decision made in the recruitment and selection process. The CEO agreed to meet with one of the Board Members and the Head of ASU to discuss the Board Member's general concerns in relation to the running of senior level campaigns.

### Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Report for end January was included with the Board papers. The CEO informed the board that although payroll is slightly favourable for January, but there are outstanding arrears due and vacancies to be filled; the current forecast is for a slight overspend on payroll for the year overall. The CEO noted that the unfavourable variance in IT and recruitment costs are due to changes in timing for some significant payments, and that overall expenditure in IT will be in line with the budget allocation.

### **Update from the Audit Committee**

There was no update as there had been no Audit Committee meeting since the last Board meeting.

### **Business Plan for 2023 and Strategy Development**

Rosemarie O'Mahony and Stephen Buckley made a presentation to the Board on this area, which included an overview of the business plan delivery for 2022 and a status report on the three key strategic projects for 2022. It also included an overview of the PAS Business Plan for 2023. The Board received an update on the plans for the development of the new Strategy, building on the current Strategy. It was agreed that any Board Members who were interested in being involved as additional touchpoints for the Board in terms of strategy development should let the Secretary know. It was noted that there would also be strategy development workshops with the full Board.

The Board noted that Nova delivery dates had moved and suggested that this should be included as a key risk for PAS and agreed it was important to avoid any further slippages. The Board noted the importance of having champions in PAS for areas such as ED&I and Protected Disclosures. The Board suggested that levers to helping reduce the backlog be identified in the Business Plan when assessing priorities.

### **Nova – Update on procurement of replacement recruitment solution and Board discussion on Future Proofing**

Rosemarie O'Mahony, Sandra Cairns and Stephen Buckley made a presentation to the Board on this key risk area. It outlined the guiding principles around Nova and gave a high level overview on progress to date. The Board was informed of all of the measures undertaken to future proof this solution; the requirements were discussed, in addition to the high level implementation approach, with an implementation plan to be agreed once the preferred vendor has been identified. The Board recognised the significant challenge which data migration will pose, and welcomed the focus on this. The Board also welcomed the focus on change management as part of this project and the opportunities for re-design of recruitment and selection and PAS operations as part of this project.

## **Capability Model**

Aoife Lyons made a presentation to the Board on the new Capability Model, including an overview of the project and the resulting framework developed. She highlighted the key changes from the previous competency framework and the reasons from moving to a capability framework. She discussed the high level feedback received to date and the implementation plans.

The Board agreed that it was important that assessment of character is clearly reflected in the model and welcomed the focus on providing guidance for selection boards on using this new model to full effect.

## **Paper to DPER on Board Member Payments**

Aoife Lyons gave an update to the Board on the Paper on Selection Board Members prepared for D/PER. The paper was made available to the Board on ShareFile. One of the Board Members agreed to meet with Aoife to provide some feedback on the paper before it is sent to DPER later in the week.

## **Next meeting**

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