

## **Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held on Teams, at 2pm on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

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

Apologies: Ms. Mary Connaughton, Ms. Yvonne Cooke.

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### **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.

Michelle Noone and Eimear O'Connor joined the meeting at this stage to discuss the Key Risk Area of Service Delivery (covering SER and General Service Grades).

It was noted that the delivery timescales were set out in the Super 8 Report and summarised in the Operational Report. The CEO informed the Board that PAS had submitted a Resourcing Paper to D/PENDR and then met with them in relation to this. The Board welcomed the agreement reached that PAS could take on 23 temporary staff to work on the general grades backlog and fund this with a transfer from a surplus in capital. It was noted that the business case for additional funding for SER is on hold until after the TLAC Review Report is released and that PAS has tried to address resourcing in this area in the meantime by moving people from other areas. The CEO also informed the Board that PAS has also made a case to D/PENDR to increase sanctioned numbers by 15 in order to fill maternity leave posts and key posts on Project Nova, and that this business case is being costed. The Board also welcomed the D/PENDR agreement to facilitate the transfer of funds from ASG, once the MOU and letter of agreement is in place between PAS and AGS (which is also being costed currently).

Michelle Noone updated the Board on progress being made in the area of SER recruitment, including the formation of two recruitment teams (TLAC and non-TLAC), informing the Board that the scheduling backlog has been cleared on the TLAC side and has been significantly reduced on the non-TLAC side. It was noted that there are 35 live campaigns, and campaigns are being advertised within four weeks of receipt of the required documentation with the aim of reducing this to two weeks. Michelle informed the Board that the focus is now on completing the scheduled campaigns as soon as possible. The Board agreed that the removal of backlogs for TLAC campaigns is very helpful and welcomed the progress being made in this area and looked forward to this being reflected in the KPIs in Q2.

Eimear O'Connor gave a presentation to the Board, giving an overview of general grades clearance and assignments in Q1, highlighting the decrease in requests and increase in assignments (with Clerical Officer assignments up 42% on the same period on 2022). She provided an overview of the actions taken in Q1 and the planned actions. She also provided an overview of current performance versus 2019, highlighting the lower numbers of applications per campaigns and the negative impact of this, and the increase in requests and replacement requests. She provided an overview of Clerical Officer recruitment and the difficulties being experienced in the current environment, highlighting that although assignment numbers are down due to a number of these factors, performance has increased, and the impact of changes made are now having a positive effect on timescales.

The Board welcomed the interventions that had taken place since the last meeting but were disappointed that the delivery timescales in both of these areas are still not close to achieving the targets set. It was noted that some of the initiatives implemented will take some time to impact on timescales and that this should happen from Q2 onwards. It was noted that the new initiatives being implemented will build on those already put in place.

The Board questioned the increase in headcount in recent years; the CEO informed the Board that these increases were funded by both the HSE and AGS who provided transfers of funding to PAS to take on additional recruitment. It was noted that staff numbers were not increased in other areas.

The Board discussed the impact of staff movement in the system on recruitment and the impact of candidates submitting multiple applications for roles and noted that a significant percentage of applicants for roles are already in the civil service. It was also noted that there are regional and organisational variations in relation to difficulties filling posts. The Board welcomed the approach PAS is taking in relation to working with clients in organisations where it is proving difficult to fill vacancies in order to improve the client brand and provide candidates with additional information about the roles and the organisations concerned. The Board noted the impact of hybrid working on the areas of assignments with a demand from candidates for placement in organisations who offer increased flexibility. Although PAS has identified some general trends, central policy decisions would be required in order to make any changes which would impact on this area, and it was noted that this would have to be balanced with the need for the civil service to provide mobility and promotional opportunities to staff and attract staff to potentially difficult to fill roles in regional areas. It was agreed that any measures which could ascertain a candidate's interest in following through on their application as early as possible would be beneficial.

The Board agreed that the additional staff should have an impact on general service delivery and welcomed the D/PENDR commitment to reviewing the eligibility criteria for the EO in order to increase supply and reduce the complexity at clearance stage. The Board welcomed the removal of all non-essential elements from the clearance and assignments process and asked the executive to consider the possibility of running blitz type events again as PAS had demonstrated great agility and achieved significant results through the use of these events in the past. The Board acknowledged the overall progress being made in a difficult recruitment market and noted that once the new staff are all in PAS and trained in the processes, that the impact should be apparent. The Board noted and welcomed the changes in practices and agreed that it would be critical to see the result of these being reflected in the KPIs, noting that some changes could not be made mid-campaign but are not in place.

The CEO informed the Board that the PAS client managers would be engaging further with clients once the KPIs have been reduced and will attempt to assure clients that PAS can deliver in a timely manner and therefore reduce the number of clients recruiting in the same market as PAS.

The CEO updated the Board on Project Nova and informed them that the ITT is due to be published this week following required clarifications and assurances from the OGP in relation to the evaluation process.

It was noted that the meeting had taken place with a Member of the Board in order to clarify the process around video interviews and assurance was provided that the application forms are also taken into account in this process. It was also noted that the Capability Framework had been circulated to the Board Member to provide assurance in relation to how values and the assessment of character are included in the process. The Board discussed this area and agreed that scenario type questions to assess this are always used as part of senior level interviews and the calibre of selection boards constituted at this level ensure they can successfully ascertain how people operate in practice.

The Board noted that PAS is engaging with one of the PAS Board Members in relation to advice around the approach to a Capacity Review to be undertaken as part of Project Nova.

The CEO thanked Anne-Marie for her contribution to the ED&I Conference which was very successful. The Board noted that there was a gender imbalance in favour of females at the conference and noted that it is crucial for males to also engage in this area. It was acknowledged that a lot of HR professional tend to be female and that efforts were made to ensure a gender balance at the conference.

The CEO also updated the Board on the positive feedback from the recent ETP re-assessment and the outcome of the Schools Pitch Competition. The CEO also highlighted the outcome of the recent meeting with the UK Civil Service Commission.

### Risk Management

The CEO updated the Board on some key risk areas. This included an update on the protected disclosure investigation which is still underway due to the scale of the disclosure. It was noted that PAS is engaging with the CPSA on this to ensure they are satisfied with the investigation, which they have been to date. The Board noted that the scope of the disclosure had been widened and agreed that it is critical to investigate all such disclosures thoroughly, keep the discloser informed and ensure that we learn from any issues which arise.

The CEO updated the Board on the decision to ban Tik Tok from all corporate devices, with the exception of those staff in Marketing who require access. It was noted that a DPIA is to be prepared by Marketing in respect of this access.

### Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Report for end March was included with the Board papers.

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

The Board noted the minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting and welcomed the clean report from the C&AG in relation to the 2021 audit.

## **Internal Control Report 2022**

The Board noted this report, which was received in advance. Catherine Dobbins provided a summary of the purpose and the findings of the report. It was noted that no significant issues had been identified and that the report provided assurance in relation to key areas.

## **Update on ED&I Diagnostic**

Siobhan McKenna and Mark Whelan joined the meeting to give a presentation to the Board on this area. Siobhan McKenna outlined the background to this review of PAS as a recruiter, the process adopted and the outcome of the review. Mark Whelan outlined the key actions to be implemented and the progress achieved to date in relation to these. The team discussed the next steps and the proposed implementation approach. The Board welcomed this initiative and discussed the key role of client organisations in creating the right environment for new staff. It was acknowledged that ED&I needs to be championed in client organisations, and that there is a need for a Civil Service ED&I Strategy, led by D/PENDR. Siobhan highlighted the need for PAS to focus on ED&I in the assessment approaches being adopted and in engaging diverse selection board members. The Board welcomed the planned engagement with client organisations in relation to the co-design approach to be adopted in terms of reasonable accommodations. It was noted that while PAS can try an increase the diversity of assignments, clients have a crucial role in ensuring retention and advancement, and this requires strong central policy support. It was agreed that the actions being implemented from the ED&I Diagnostic in respect of PAS as an organisation would be discussed with the Board at the next meeting.

## **Strategy Development**

Rosemarie O'Mahony, Catherine Dobbins and Louise McEntee gave a presentation to the Board on this area. The approach to, and priorities identified from, the environmental scanning were discussed. It was noted that only minor changes were suggested to the text around the vision, mission and values, as this had been a significant area of work during the previous strategy. It was noted that the new strategy would have an increased focus on delivery at its entire, supported by people, systems and culture, and a focus on driving excellence and removing all barriers to this. The draft end-states in terms of delivering recruitment excellence, driving excellence and developing our people, systems and culture were proposed. The Board welcomed the focus on delivery and implementation and agreed that it was aspirational and was well positioned. The Board welcomed the move to the position of PAS as a thought leader in the area of public service recruitment and selection.

The Board agreed that the implementation framework will be key and that the goals must be measurable and appropriate. The Board noted the need for clients to work in partnership with PAS to remove the barriers identified. The Board noted that it is critical that clients can immediately see the focus on delivery and that PAS is addressing their concerns in this area and holding itself to account. It was agreed that strategy should strike a balance between reflection and tangible targets and objectives and should guide how PAS will respond to unforeseen events. The Board discussed how the operational and recruitment environment will fundamentally change over the lifetime of this strategy and it would be important to reflect the potential extent of this change in the statement itself. The Board also agreed that it is critical that the new strategy reflects all of the values and that they find expression in the overall objectives of PAS.

It was noted that there would be further engagement with client organisations and D/PENDR once the Board feedback had been incorporated and that this would be through the CEO's office.

It was agreed that an updated version would be circulated to the Board with a tight deadline for feedback and that an online session could be organised with the Board if required. It was also agreed that the Board would have a strategy session later this year to look at strategy using a 10-year lens and that the Management Board would also do this. The Board would also be engaged at that stage in relation to the Implementation framework.

### **Annual Report of the Audit Committee**

Kevin Smyth, the Chair of the Audit Committee, attended the meeting to discuss the Annual Report of the Audit Committee from 2022, which had been circulated to the Board in advance. He noted the significant changes in the Committee in 2022 and welcomed the new members. He informed the Board that the Committee would have a good public/private sector balance and good gender balance as a new member has agreed to join the Committee. He informed the Board that the Committee is focused on maintaining the previous high standards and highlighted the delivery of five comprehensive audits in 2022. He noted that the majority of the recommendations are either implemented or in progress. He discussed the three key risk areas of focus for the Committee, including Project Nova, business continuity and service delivery timescales. He also highlighted the focus of the Committee on cyber security and the benefits of having a serving CIO on the Committee in respect of this area. He thanked the CEO and Catherine and Ciara for their support to the Committee. He also welcomed the level of access to the CEO and the quality of material provided to the Committee from the management in PAS and noted that a recent survey of the Committee indicated high levels of satisfaction with the operation of the Committee and the audit environment in PAS. The Chairman of the Board thanked the Chair of the Audit Committee for taking on this role and indicated that himself and the CEO are always available to him.

### **Annual Report 2022**

It was agreed that the Board would provide any feedback on the draft report by the end of the month.

### **Next meeting**

21<sup>st</sup> June at 9.30am.