

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 10.30am on 26th February 2024

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Margaret McCabe, Ms. Fiona Quinn*, Ms. Anne Marie Hoey, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Mr. Colin Menton, Ms. Valerie Lawlor, Ms. Sinead Burns.
Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Yvonne Cooke.

**Attended virtually.*

The Chairman welcomed the two new members to the Board and introductions took place.

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.

As the first Board meeting in 2024, the CEO noted that significant progress was made in 2023 despite it being a tough year for the organisation. She noted that senior level recruitment delivery has seen significant improvements and that progress was made in large volume recruitment, while acknowledging that challenges still remain in this area. The CEO informed the Board that actions will be implemented following a recent Management Board session to ensure that the Management Board is continuing to adopt a strategic approach to meeting organisational challenges and to maximising the benefits of the significant change programme underway. She noted that the Business Insights Team has been strengthened and there is engagement across recruitment to ensure all aspects of campaigns are being appropriately measured and reported on, clearly identifying factors within and outside of the control of PAS impacting on delivery.

The Board welcomed the improvements in service delivery, particularly at a senior level, despite the increase in demands at this level, and acknowledged the work by PAS in this area. The Board agreed it was important to measure all areas within PAS control and for PAS to identify areas (such as at planning stage) where delays are due to factors outside of PAS control, including client behaviour. The Board noted that there may be opportunities to attract more candidates from Northern Ireland to roles in the public service and that it would be important to measure the impact of any actions taken to do this.

It was acknowledged that general grades is still not at the service delivery level required; while it was noted that some changes will take time to embed and that there continue to be difficulties with the current tight labour market, it was agreed to continue to monitor this area

closely. It was noted that the implementation of Nova should assist with this area and in meeting identified skills shortages in the public service.

The CEO provided an update on the Capacity Review; external engagement was completed in February and a Report on Phase I is due to be submitted to the Management Board for discussion at meeting in March. The Board agreed to have an additional meeting to consider this Report before it is sent to the Department. It was noted that Phase II will be conducted in conjunction with the roll out of Nova.

The CEO informed the Board that standstill letters issued to all vendors in respect of Nova on February 1st (standstill period is expected to last for 30 days). It was noted that PAS signed a contract on February 16th with a cost of 11.5m over 15 years. The CEO informed the Board that Initial introductions and project mobilisation has commenced and that the successful vendor is one of the biggest global market leading recruitment software companies and that they have public sector experience.

The Board welcomed the progress on this project and noted that there is a 12 month implementation stage and that further engagement will take place with D/PENDR in relation to STAR decommissioning costs which have not been funded in our capital allocation. The Board welcomed the positive outcome to recent LA court cases.

The CEO updated the Board on actions from last meeting. It was noted that the Executive Search team benchmarked the recruitment process undertaken by external providers; the standard timeline is 16 weeks with some flexibility either side; our current KPI is 14 weeks from advertisement.

The CEO informed the Board that the Office of Government Procurement Executive Search framework has expired; in January 2024 a request for information was sent to 50+ Executive Search Agencies requesting they advise their areas of expertise by Sector, Level, Board Appointments, and Interim placements. It was noted that we have drafted a full standardised suite of Procurement templates which will enable us to reduce our Procurement process timeline from 8 to 6 weeks. The Board asked to be kept updated on developments in this area.

Risk Management

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register and the Report on Risk which had been provided with the Board papers.

Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Reports included with the Board papers.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted draft Minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting. The Board agreed to nominate Mary Connaughton as the Board nominee on the Audit Committee.

Update on Tilting the Lens Project

Siobhan McKenna and Niall Leavy gave a presentation to the Board on this project which provided a blueprint for supporting and welcoming disabled employees in the civil and public sector. The team acknowledged the support of the Public Service Innovation Fund for this

project. Issues were identified in relation to the process, communications and information around the assignments process and actions for change in these areas were also identified. The next steps identified included both external and internal steps, including actions for PAS and D/PENDR.

The Board had a wide discussion in relation to this presentation, around areas such as the legal definition of disability and reasonable accommodations, the interview process, the process for informing PAS and employers in relation to reasonable accommodations and the challenges identified by PAS in placing candidates in roles which best match their skills and requirements. It was noted that the new capability model, the new approach to merit, the new central initiatives around part-time working and supportive probation processes would address some of the challenges in this area. The Board welcomed this Report and agreed that active engagement by all parties in progressing the short and long term actions would lead to positive changes in this area for all concerned. It was noted that a lot of actions are not within the remit of PAS but that PAS will seek to influence the implementation of these wider recommendations while implementing actions within its control.

Business Plan for 2024 and Nua 23 End of Strategy Review

Stephen Buckley and Rosemarie O'Mahony gave a presentation on this area. The Board noted the documents provided with the Board papers on both topics and agreed both documents, noting the central focus on recruitment excellence in both the new strategy and the annual business plan. The Board asked that PAS consider including ED&I baseline data in its regular reporting.

Changes arising and planned from working with the CSMB and People Management Sub-Group

Sandra Cairns and Eimear O'Connor gave a presentation on this area. They provided an overview of the implementation of recommendations from the review of CO and TCO recruitment and also highlighted areas to be included in the review of EO/AO and HEO recruitment. It was noted that some of these will require engagement centrally with unions.

Branding Update

Niall Leavy and Aine Gallagher gave a presentation on this area. It was noted that the Public Appointments Service will continue to be the official name of the organisation but focus will be put on promoting publicjobs as a brand to increase talent attraction in order to attract a wider range of candidates with future-focused skills to the public service. It was noted that the Marketing Team are using existing Marketing funding to start this project by decreasing other marketing activities and pausing the Schools Project. It was noted that recruitment advertising is not impacted by this and will continue at the same level.

The Board agreed that this was an impressive piece of work and welcomed the stakeholder communications plan. It was agreed that PAS can only do what it can with its existing budget and agreed that there may be opportunities for collaboration and integration with other work to achieve greater audience reach with such a tight budget. The team agreed to share the final design with the Board.

Draft Workplan for 2024

The updated draft Workplan for 2024 was noted. The Board agreed to meet online in March to review the Capacity Review Report in lieu of a meeting in October.

Next meeting and AOB

The next meeting will be on 29th April at 10.30am.