

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 9.30am on 21st June 2023

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

Apologies: Ms. Mary Connaughton, Ms. Yvonne Cooke, Mr. Colin Menton.

Meeting without the Executive

The Board met without the executive present before the meeting commenced. The Chairperson agreed to update the CEO and Secretary in relation to agreed actions from the discussion following the meeting.

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 informed the Board that the Nova ITT was published on May 19th and a bidder's briefing was held on June 1st (which was attended by all four vendors). It was noted that a small number of clarifications have been received from the vendors, including a request for extension, which is currently being considered.

The CEO informed the Board that timelines are being achieved for Q2 to date for Medical Consultant and P&T recruitment, with State Boards and Local Authority recruitment both improving. She informed the Board that significant progress has been made in reducing delays in advertising TLAC campaigns, but that there is now a risk that TLACs own availability will negatively impact on timelines. It was noted that service delivery timescales for the current campaigns in progress have been included in the report, and no major issues are apparent, with only SER below target at present. The CEO informed the Board that progress is being made in reducing the general service backlog, with a 28% increase in Clerical Officer assignments, and a 5% increase in overall general service assignments (compared to 2022); it was noted that timescales remain at 16% due to the backlog but additional staff are commencing over June and July. The CEO highlighted the increase in activity levels in terms of advertisements, interviews and assignments.

The Board agreed that PAS should only be measuring and reporting on the aspects of the TLAC process within the control of PAS and that an SLA is needed with TLAC in relation to their responsibilities in the process.

The Board discussed the importance of establishing the root causes of the delays in general service assignments. The CEO informed the Board of some of the measures being taken to address the delays, including reducing the number of board members and streamlining the process to the greatest extent possible. It was noted that due to the current volume of demand that additional resources are required in this area.

The CEO informed the Board that she has been asked to present a paper to CSMB at their meeting later this week. The CEO noted that the paper includes an overview of recruitment service delivery, and highlights the challenges being faced in public service recruitment and the actions being implemented to meet those challenges. It was noted PAS is carrying out public service recruitment in very challenging and unprecedented labour market conditions, and while PAS is delivering in a number of areas, the paper identifies those areas where PAS is not achieving its targets (focusing on SER and general grades). It was noted that the main challenges being experienced can only be addressed by increasing the numbers attracted to these roles and by allocating increased resources to process the increased number of applicants required. The Board highlighted the importance of clients retaining those staff that we recruit and stressed the importance of the client offering for both attraction and retention, including their approach to hybrid working, location flexibility, their focus on people management, digitalisation and an overall quality job offering. The Board asked that we consider the option of allowing candidates to self-select for particular roles using an online system in order to better match the roles on offer with the candidates applying. The Board discussed the overall investment in TCO recruitment and agreed that it needs to demonstrate a return on investment, and this might be achieved by using this as an internship with a path to permanency for those who perform well. It was agreed that this should be raised with CSMB and consideration given to the length of contracts to ensure value for money for the government resources invested in it. The Board also suggested that clients should be asked to engage with PAS in relation to their workforce needs identified as part of the estimates process in their organisation in order to inform the PAS estimates submission. It was agreed that the CSMB Paper would be circulated to the Board for information following the CSMB meeting.

The CEO updated the Board on the meeting with D/PENDR the previous day. It was noted that service delivery, resourcing, the performance delivery agreement, the new Statement of Strategy, and the planned capacity review had all been discussed. The Board agreed to discuss the draft Terms of Reference for the capacity review in September.

Risk Management

The CEO updated the Board on some key risk areas. This included an update on the investigation of the Disclosure previously reported which is nearing conclusion (with a report expected to issue before August); it was noted that this report will include a response to the CPSA to assist in their investigations of the same matter. The CEO informed the Board that two Protected Disclosures were submitted anonymously to PAS in relation to a Garda promotional competition, and that PAS has taken actions to ensure that the alleged issues identified had no impact on the selection process. It was also noted that a Protected Disclosure was received relating to a specific Local Authority competition alleging that the Local Authority in question has a "preferred candidate" and that there may be an attempt to lead the Board towards that appointment; it was noted that mitigations will be put in place to ensure that the independence of the selection process is robustly upheld.

The CEO informed the Board that the DPO and Quality Manager are investigating all circumstances leading to the recent data breach and a report will be prepared shortly.

Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Report for the end of March was included with the Board papers. The CEO noted that payroll is slightly favourable for May, but there are outstanding vacancies to be filled and appointments pending which will lead to an overspend. It was noted that incidental costs are unfavourable due to a one-off payment for legal settlement of a case which was not included in the budget; and that Interview Board costs are unfavourable due to the volume of interviews.

Key Risk Area – Data Protection & Cyber Security

The Board noted the paper from the DPO (Sinead Dolan) which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The DPO joined the meeting and outlined the main issues identified and the potential impact on PAS operations. She noted that although this risk impacts on the whole public service, it is particularly significant for PAS as our primary function involves the processing of significant amounts of personal data. It was noted that a macro level response is required to this risk but it will be kept under active consideration by PAS.

Paul Page and Gavin McEntee gave a presentation to the Board on the area of cyber security. The Board agreed that the presentation provided assurance that risks in this area are being carefully and proactively managed.

The Board suggested that PAS consider adopting a Code of Ethics to demonstrate how the PAS values should be lived in the organisation and to incorporate our approach to managing personal information.

Customer Engagement Plan Summary

The Board noted this Plan and welcomed the fact that it is now in place considering the importance of obtaining customer feedback on an ongoing and consistent basis; the Board agreed that the content of the Plan was welcome but that the time taken to develop it could have been shorter. While the Board welcomed the commitment to customer engagement, the Board agreed that PAS should also have SLAs in place with clients that would outline their responsibilities and the behaviours expected. It was agreed that there are obligations on both sides to deliver and this needs to be documented in a standardised manner and clients need to sign up to this.

Update on ED&I Diagnostic – PAS as an Employer

Fiona Morgan gave a presentation to the Board on this area. The Board welcomed the measures being put in place and recognised that as the front window for public service recruitment it is essential that PAS has a proactive approach to ED&I. It was noted that staff feedback on these areas is very positive and Fiona informed the Board that the People & Culture team are currently reviewing which interventions are providing the greatest return on investment.

Audit & Assurance Arrangement (and Risk Appetite Review)

The Board agreed the document which had been circulated in advance. The Board agreed that they are happy for the Audit Committee to conduct the deep dives into the main key risk areas and to provide the Board with an update on this.

Next meeting and Strategy Session

The Board agreed to meet on 18th or 22nd September to hold both a Board meeting and a strategy session.