

Minutes of ninety-third meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held remotely by Zoom, at 2.00pm on 22nd June 2021

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Mary Hurley, Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Mr. John O'Callaghan, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Mr. Dave Cagney, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Anne O'Connor.

Meeting without the Executive

The Board met from 2pm to 3pm without the executive present, and discussed a number of matters. The Chairman gave an overview of the areas discussed at the later meeting of the full Board. These included suggestions for the Board Strategy Session in September and the time lens for viewing strategy. The earlier meeting also covered options for external performance evaluation, Board composition and responding to a cyber-security event. The Board noted the plans for an upcoming desk-top exercise on responding to a cyber-security attack and the proposed external advice being sought in relation to this exercise. It was agreed that the Chairman would discuss the areas raised with the CEO at a later date.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CEO's Report for the Board and Operational Report

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

The CEO updated the Board on a number of key areas.

The CEO discussed the PAS Super 8 Performance Report, pointing out that Recruitment Service Delivery had been moved from "amber" to "green". She outlined that the setting of criteria for determining when a dial is amber or green is a work in progress, and includes weighting the various factors feeding into each area. It was noted that the Management Board is working on agreeing guidelines for non-project related indicators which feed into each of the Super 8 and the weighting to be given to various areas (including the weighting for activity levels). It was agreed that going forward, changes will only be made for the quarterly reports, and the criteria will be formalised; the Board welcomed this approach.

The CEO outlined how the demand-led recruitment approach in large volume recruitment leads to smaller numbers being invited to interview, and that the process take longer as EOIs (Expressions of Interest) are issued in advance to ascertain the level of interest among candidates; however, the outcome is greater numbers attending interview, positions filled more efficiently and smaller panels in place. The CEO explained that the data on Quarter Two activity levels is only available up to the end of May 2021, and therefore the Q2 data set

is based on two rather than three months activity. The Board noted that it is expected that campaigns advertised and assignment figures will exceed the quarterly averages, and that interviews will be close to average at the end of Q2. The CEO informed the Board that the number of applications and assessments is closely related to the timing of large volume campaigns, with a number of these campaigns planned for later this year, including, AP (Standard and Higher), CO (Irish), AO (Multiple streams), Counsellor, Crime & Policing Analyst, PO and TCO. The Board noted the significant drop in applications and assessments and expect that these numbers should be higher at year end based on the plans for the large volume campaigns discussed at the meeting.

The CEO highlighted the areas where the key metrics are not being met in relation to campaign delivery and general grade assignment. The Board noted that there has been a significant focus on these areas since the last quarter and improvements can be seen in both. The CEO informed the Board that additional staff have been allocated to general grade assignments and senior managers have been working with units to increase their understanding of the factors causing delays and addressing those issues. It was noted that Medical Consultant, SER and State Boards areas are now on target. The CEO highlighted the risk that the significant volume of campaigns being requested and projected for Medical Consultant recruitment may impact adversely on the timelines being achieved for the remainder of the year, with a 96% increase in activity to date in 2021 and significantly more recruitment expected in this area. The Board discussed the upcoming demands in relation to HSE recruitment to support developments such as Sláintecare, and new regional structures, and welcomed the ongoing engagement with the HSE to clarify demands. The Board suggested also engaging with the Sláintecare Programme Office in relation to their plans and the potential impact on PAS. The Board agreed that it is critical for PAS to have as much advance notice of HSE requirements as possible in order to be able to plan and meet their needs.

It was noted that P&T timelines had improved in Q2, but were still not on target; and reporting for Local Authorities was based on two campaigns completed in Q2, with both being subject to client delays in supplying nominees for boards. It was noted that both units are working with clients to agree tailored targets for all campaigns, and that this is now in place for all new campaign requests received, but that it will take some time for this development to be visible in the campaign completion statistics. It was also noted that a number of campaigns in both areas are panel campaigns and more similar to large volume, and these are being separated out, and time to fill posts from these panels will be measured, rather than the running of the large campaign itself (this will apply to nationwide campaigns for Senior Executive Engineer / Planner, etc. and for civil service posts such as IT specialists at all levels). The Board was also informed that the upcoming internal audit on recruitment timescales will review the processes and systems in place. The CEO notified the Board that the CPSA has informed PAS that all local authorities have requested their own recruitment licences. The Board noted that engagement is ongoing in relation to these plans and agreed that it is critical to ensure that the role of PAS in terms of independence and impartiality is maintained, and that the local authority sector recognise the developments and performance improvements achieved through the use of a centralised approach to recruitment.

The CEO informed the Board that large volume assignments are 46% above projections and PAS is confident that service delivery in this area will exceed delivery in 2020. The CEO discussed her engagement with senior managers in the Civil Service in relation to anticipated demands due to increased retirements, and the potential support being offered at this level to PAS in its engagement with DPER in relation to a request for additional funding to meet client demands across the system.

The Board discussed the increased volume of request for reviews. The CEO outlined that a large number related to two large volume campaigns. The CEO informed the Board that any trends identified are discussed with the unit concerned and Quality unit, with an average of 10% of decisions overturned each year at formal review stage.

The CEO informed the Board that the first meeting of the ED&I Project Board was held on 18th May, chaired by Salome Mbugua, Commissioner for IHREC. The Board noted that the Terms of Reference were agreed at the meeting and that there was a discussion on the implementation of the Reasonable Accommodations Roadmap project, They noted that the Project Board will meet on a quarterly basis, with the next meeting in September. The Board also noted the range of ED&I related initiatives being progressed outlined in the Board papers.

The Board noted the update on Project Nova included with the Board papers. The CEO informed the Board that PAS has now developed an understanding of the functionality and service offering of key players in the Talent Acquisition Suite industry, identifying opportunities the suites provide for service delivery improvements and assessing their fit to meet PAS's operational and strategic requirements. The CEO outlined that the delivery of this stage of the project, on-time and on-budget, and with positive outcomes represents a significant and successful result for a major milestone in the NOVA programme. The Board noted that the next phase of the project includes the drafting of the RFT and the preparation of the business case for capital allocation as part of the Estimates process. The Board agreed that they would be interested in the findings from this initial phase in relation to what the market can offer.

The CEO highlighted the very positive results of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey from PAS perspective, with a 94% completion rate and 81% score on employee engagement (putting PAS in 3rd place across 51 Government Departments and Offices). The Board noted the significant progress across areas such as Innovation, Public Perception, Learning and Development, Involvement Climate, Career Development, Manager Support and Organisational Support. The Board agreed that the results achieved by PAS were significant, being consistently higher than the civil service average, and that they are a very positive reflection on local management.

The CEO also updated the Board on the approach being adopted by PAS in relation to the *Future of Work*, with a commitment to a hybrid model and engagement with staff and management on this theme. The CEO outlined how the Future of Work group has been a useful platform for engaging with staff in relation to their perspectives and concerns around the future of work. The CEO also outlined the external speakers who have shared their experiences of operating a hybrid working model which is helping to inform our thinking. It was noted that PAS was awaiting the civil service policy framework to be agreed by Civil Service Management Board before finalising its own approach. The Board noted that staff surveys have been carried out on this topic and that a session has been held with the Management Board to explore the principles and values that will underpin our future operating model. The Board noted the plans to host similar sessions with managers and staff over the coming weeks to help refine our thinking and inform how best to operationalise a hybrid working model, considering our digital and physical infrastructure. The Board noted that PAS has also been ensuring that the new building will facilitate any new approaches to working and assessments. It was agreed that this area would be discussed in detail at the next Board meeting.

The CEO provided an update on the building project, including the commencement of initial construction work. It was noted that floor three has an approximate finish date in early November 2021, and that the overall timescale has been reduced from 72 weeks to 39. The CEO updated the Board on developments in relation to AV consultants who are working with

OPW on design, and that two sample interview rooms are almost ready for viewing. The CEO informed the Board that the OPW lease for Baggot Street has been terminated by the landlord and PAS are working with OPW to identify alternative solutions.

The Board agreed that the update on the strategic programme of work was very useful and suggested that Project Nova and Agresso updates could be incorporated into this report, and some of the detail might be removed.

Risk Management

The Board noted the risks as outlined in the Operational report.

Financial Position

The CEO outlined that staff costs are running ahead of profile as at the end May; these figures do include some costs of additional staff taken on for HSE Covid recruitment work, for which funding from the HSE but has not been transferred to PAS budget yet. However, it was noted that after adjusting for these costs it is still likely that the payroll expenditure for the year will be higher than the allocated amount.

The Board noted that courier costs mainly relate to the provision of paperwork to PAS Representatives for note taking (these are individualised and therefore contain personal data). It was noted that IT costs are in line with profile at end May with a slight positive variance; some new pressures associated with return to work and cyber security have emerged and the budget is being reviewed in order to re-prioritise expenditure. The CEO informed the Board that interview costs are in line with profile, and up by 81% when compared to the same period in 2020, reflecting the significant increase in recruitment activity this year.

It was noted that there was no capital expenditure to date in 2021, and that DPER has confirmed that €200k capital carryforward will be available in 2021 in addition to the capital allocation of €1.8m.

Key Strategic Issue: Putting Customer at the Centre - Client Engagement

The Head of Client Engagement, Catherine Morris, gave a presentation to the Board, outlining the results of the recent client surveys. She highlighted the key learnings from the surveys and discussed the proposed next steps. The Board agreed that the client feedback was very welcome, and again highlighted the area of timescales. The Board welcomed the planned actions and agreed it would be very important to communicate to clients as to the actions to be taken as a result of their feedback.

Key Risk Area: Review Audit & Assurance Arrangements (including Risk Appetite)

The Board noted and agreed the revised Audit and Assurance arrangements, including the risk appetite statement. The Board welcomed the clear governance arrangements in place with DPER.

Update from the Audit Committee

No update since the last meeting as there has been no Audit Committee meeting. The Board noted the appointment of new Internal Audit partners.

Board Evaluation Action Plan

The Board discussed the areas highlighted in this Plan at their meeting without the executive present.

Areas for Inclusion in Strategy Session in September

The Board agreed to discuss areas such as the Future of Work, the PAS approach to managing large volumes of applications, and Project Nova. The Board welcomed plans for a mix of internal and external speakers, and an opportunity for in-depth discussion on key strategic issues.

Next meeting

To be arranged for September (to include Strategy Session).