

Minutes of ninety-ninth meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held on zoom, at 2pm on 22nd June 2022

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Anne O'Connor.

The Board thanked the CEO (Shirley Comerford) on her huge contribution to PAS over a very challenging period, and agreed that the Board had enjoyed working with her over her period of time in office.

The Board discussed the appointment of an Interim CEO and noted that the CEO is recommending that the Chief Operations Officer (Margaret McCabe) as her nominee for the role. The CEO informed the Board that DPER had agreed to an interim appointment in an acting-up capacity and that DPER had also sanctioned the recruitment of a replacement CEO on a five-year contract basis. The CEO informed the Board that Margaret was aware of the three main priorities for PAS (Chapter House refurbishment and return of staff to the office; implementing the service delivery action plan; and Project Nova), and that all three are well underway. The Board agreed that it was important that the recruitment process for the new CEO be progressed as quickly as possible and it was agreed that the recruitment plan would be shared with the Board as soon as it is agreed. The Board noted the succession plan in place for the Head of Operations, with an internal AP identified on the PO panel who possessed the required skills to take on this role.

The Board agreed that the Head of Operations would be a suitable appointment as Interim CEO and agreed that she should join the meeting. Margaret McCabe then joined the zoom 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 discussed the recruitment delivery targets, and informed the Board that 98% of roles had been filled for clients in 2022 to date. She also outlined that 68% of campaigns had been delivered in timescales agreed with clients for 2022, but that this was 81% for Q2 to date and is therefore moving in a positive direction, following the implementation of the various actions discussed at the last meeting. It was noted that the Local Authority sector is now at 94% for delivery within timescales in 2022, and that although P&T's delivery timescales are at 77%, this had increased to 91% in Q2 to date. It was noted that the

Medical Consultants delivery timescales are at 70%, and concerningly that SER remains at 50%. It was noted that although State Boards is at 50% for delivery timescales in 2022, it was up to 89% in Q2 to date.

The area of most concern continues to be general grade assignments which were down to 29% of delivery timescales achieved in Q2 to date, mainly due to the difficulties outlined at the previous meeting around attrition rates, lack of workforce planning and increased demand. However, it was noted that in the period January to May '22 there was an over 45% increase in the volume of requests received compared to 2021. The CEO informed that Board that there is ongoing work underway across these recruitment units to streamline processes and get candidates through the process as quickly as possible while also maintaining robust assessment standards. She outlined how the changes made to the Clearance Units has seen returns, with monthly increases in the volume of assignments (in May, 788 assignments were made, an increase of over 70% on what was achieved in January).

The Board was concerned to see that client engagement with workforce planning is not improving and discussed the impact this may be having on the ability of PAS to attract the talent and skills clients require. It was agreed that it would be important for future organisational capability reviews to focus on this area. The Board welcomed that PAS has escalated the lack of workforce planning to higher levels in client organisations. The Board recommended that PAS plan to deliver to levels above projected demand, knowing the workforce planning is only capturing half of actual demand.

The Board noted that the loss of staff time due to the overall reduction in working hours in the civil service may impact on productivity, and welcomed the Management Board assurance that any risks are being mitigated.

It was noted that the service delivery action plan, and increased resources in recruitment were having an impact in some areas, and the Board highlighted the need to ensure that impacts can be seen across all recruitment areas.

The Board noted the positive feedback received to date in relation to the new AGS recruitment models and welcomed the opportunity to expand this client engagement and campaign delivery approach to other AGS roles.

The Board recognised the need for PAS to be responsive and agile in order to be able to respond to unforeseen demands and asked that the Management Board review the potential PAS responses to a significant surge.

The CEO informed that Board that there has been considerable interest from clients in the panel of TCOs with Ukrainian language skills, with 122 candidates assigned to date. The Board welcomed the ongoing collaboration between PAS and key clients in relation to this and the positive feedback received. It was noted that the competition remains open until 15th July and that it will be reviewed at that stage and will be extended further extend if required.

The CEO discussed some aspects of the return to the office in June with the Board. She outlined how Team Time sessions are being delivered to all staff in order to to equip staff and managers with the skills for working effectively in a hybrid team. She informed the Board that during June, all staff will attend the office at least one day per week as part of an 'Anchor day' system where teams have the opportunity to work together and collaborate on-site. The CEO informed the Board that it is anticipated that further areas of the building will also open soon, providing a significant increase in office capacity and access to facilities and IT infrastructure which will facilitate the launch of the 'neighbourhood' system, with all units having a designated specific areas of the office to work and collaborate in.

The CEO updated the Board on the schools advertising challenge, noting that more than 180 schools had registered for the initiative in year one, with more than 100 post-primary students from across the country taking part in The Pitch challenge, with videos submitted in both Irish and English. The CEO updated the Board on the live interactive online event, hosted on publicjobs.ie, to announce the winners from the eight finalists.

The CEO informed the Board that final meeting of the Steering group for the competency review project for Clerical Officer – Principal Officer took place, and the new proposed Capability Framework was accepted, with excellent feedback from the group. The Board noted that there was a very useful discussion around the implementation of the model, not just for recruitment but also PMDS and L&D across the Civil Service, and that work is now ongoing on a system to host the model in an interactive format, as well as drafting of communications for relevant stakeholders.

The CEO provided an update on Project Nova, including the establishment of the peer review process with four members of an External Advisory Committee, and the publication of the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire tender document to the market in June 2022. The Board welcomed the appointment of the External Advisory Committee and were satisfied with the constitution of same.

The CEO informed the Board that the ESRI are in the final stages of the Equality Monitoring Dashboard project and have analysed data relating to 4,500 campaigns, across the civil and public sector including candidate profile information, applications made, and appointments; the ESRI's report is due in early July.

The Board was provided with an update on the Public Sector Recruiter Network and the recent successful session on 'Best Practice in Assessment'.

Risk Management

The Board noted that the ongoing issues in relation to Service Delivery Timescales was discussed as the Key Risk Area for previous meeting and the Management Board members with responsibility for Recruitment Selection are monitoring the implementation of the Service Delivery Action Plan. The CEO informed the Board that the implementation of a VOIP phone system has been completed, which will address the previously identified risk around an unsupported telephone system. The Board noted that an update on the risks highlighted by the Audit Committee was included in the Risk report.

It was noted that the Corporate Risk Register was included with the Board papers, with all updates in red; and that the Management Board is currently developing a Risk and Opportunity Register

Financial Position

The CEO discussed the Financial Report for end May which was included with the Board papers. It was noted that governance costs are running ahead of profile, due to some costs being carried forward from 2021 and expenditure on the Data Analytics and Schools Resource Kit projects. It was noted that expenditure on Interview Boards continues to remain high. It was also noted that delays in the completion and charging for work on the main Chapter House contract have resulted in total costs of €1m for the main contract being charged in the year, as well as the AV costs; OPW will issue final construction costs in June.

Update on the Key Risk Area – Procurement

The PAS Procurement Manager attended the meeting to discuss the paper on this key risk area. He highlighted the range of supporting policies and procedures now in place in PAS and assured the Board that all previous audit recommendations had been implemented in full and that there was a significant level of compliance in PAS with all procurement related procedures and reporting. He also highlighted the level of training and support being provided to staff in relation to procurement. The Board was provided with assurance in relation to the level of procurement compliance in PAS.

The Board discussed the area of Selection Board Members (which does not fall within the remit of the Procurement Manager) and agreed to discuss this at the next Board meeting, with a presentation or paper from the Board Member Unit.

Update from the Audit Committee

There was no update as there has been no audit committee meetings since the last board meeting.

The Board noted that an appointment has been made as Chair of the Audit Committee to replace Clare McGrath (who's term of office is coming to an end in September). The Chairman thanked Anne-Marie Taylor for agreeing to remain on the Audit Committee for another term.

Evidence-Based Advisory Function in the Public Appointments Service

Barry Winkless and Elysia Hegarty attended the meeting from CPL, and Catherine Morris attended from PAS, to discuss this area. The Board was very interested in how various areas and services could be incorporated into this function in order to ensure a consistent and formalised approach to advice and support. The Board discussed the client appetite for these, and how the stage-gate approach being proposed would operate in practice to incorporate the research strand.

It was agreed that PAS would review what, if any, additional capacity or capability it would require to progress this area further. It was agreed that the Board would then discuss this area again, once the new Board Members are in place, including how best these services would be provided. This presentation to the Board would include the current picture in relation to these areas and the proposed new delivery structure, and would include both potential deliverables and the demands on PAS in moving to the new model.

The Board discussed linkages between the draft Innovation Strategy and this project, and it was agreed that feedback would be provided by the Board on the PAS Innovation Strategy.

Review of Audit & Assurance Arrangements

The Board noted the minor changes to this document as part of the annual review.

Annual Report

It was noted that the draft report would be circulated to the Board for observations during July.

Next meeting

The meeting will be held on 14th September 2022 at 2pm.