

## **Minutes of ninetieth meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held remotely by Zoom, at 2.00pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020**

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

Apologies: Mr. Dave Cagney.

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### **Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising**

The minutes were agreed.

It was agreed that future minutes would include a matters arising table. It was also agreed that the Minutes would be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting. It was agreed that there would be an update on the Super 8 included on the agenda for the next meeting and a deep dive into one area at the first meeting in 2021.

### **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 which was circulated in advance of the meeting, and the update on legal and equality cases outlined therein. The Board also noted that the update on other key risk areas was included in agenda item 6.

The CEO updated the Board on a number of key areas and current trends in activity. This included an increase of 59% in the number of applications being processed in comparison to 2019, with the number of assessments also up by 18%. The CEO informed the Board that advertised posts are down 6% and assignments down 50% on 2019 figures due to a decline in requests in Q2 as a result of the pandemic. The CEO highlighted the noticeable difference between Q2 and Q3 with advertised posts up 11%, applications up 89%, assessments up 58% and assignments up 28% in Q3.

The CEO advised the Board that the CRM team have engaged with clients in relation to projected resourcing requirements, with a response rate of 60%; this was particularly useful from a P&T perspective as the responses highlighted resource requirements against 39 different roles, only 12 of which are already underway or have panels available.

The CEO advised the Board that the Management Board are currently considering the options available in terms of remote v face-to-face interviewing and the implications of all options for PAS staff, candidates, board members and clients. This includes reviewing the various delivery models, categories of posts and alternative interviewing accommodation. Feedback from all stakeholders will be incorporated into this review. It was agreed that consideration will be given to how much remote options can continue to be used going forward, and whether remote options are impacting on diversity.

The CEO also informed the Board that staff engagement continues to be high, with PAS achieving a 95% completion rate in the recent Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.

It was noted that health and wellbeing and L&D interventions are ongoing, including ergonomics supports for remote working.

The CEO informed the Board that key projects have been prioritised for 2020, including Digital Transformation (Office 365 and Project Nova); and Building Works.

The Board noted that the Office 365 project is underway, with Business Champions appointed, who will play a key role in driving adoption of the new platform within their Units; it is anticipated that Phase 1 (which includes email and Microsoft Teams) will be completed by the end of December. The CEO updated the Board on progress with project Nova including benchmarking and agreement on timescales. The Board noted that benchmarking had taken place with EPSO, the UK Cabinet Office, Microsoft, Google, Slack, SThree and Indeed (many of whom are on a similar digital transformation and service delivery path). It was noted that the benchmarking has provided valuable insights, about the best approach for delivery of a project of this nature, digital solutions on the market, and good practice in service delivery. The Board noted the provisional milestone dates, including agreement on a Sourcing Strategy by mid-January, publication of the RFT in May, and contracts signed by September.

The CEO updated the Board on the building project, including the award of contracts to T & I Fitouts Ltd. and Malone Electrical & Jones Engineering, and the proposals in relation to an accelerated programme of works (consisting of 2 Phases with Phase I (Floor 3) due for completion in April 2021 and Phase II (Floors 1 and 2) due for completion in September 2021. The Board noted the implications of this work, including very limited staff return to the office prior to the re-opening of the third floor in April 2021 (*subject to Covid-19 restrictions in place at this time*). It was also noted that there is a possibility of no on-site recruitment in Chapter House in 2021, with Baggot Street to be utilised if needed. The Board noted the benefits of an accelerated programme of work, including capitalising on the fact that staff are currently working remotely, avoiding noise and disruption in Chapter House, staff, board members and candidates returning to a refurbished Chapter House with new recruitment facilities. The Board noted that this timescale may tie in with a general return to the office in other sectors by mid-year.

The Board discussed the anticipated recruitment demands for 2021, which seem likely to increase given the funding provided to a range of clients for additional staff to deal with the current crisis and other priority areas.

The Board discussed the impact of significantly increased application numbers on the resources in PAS, both in terms of staffing and testing costs. It is expected that this trend will continue into 2021, due to the current labour market. The Board noted the alternative models being adopted to attempt to manage the large numbers fairly and consistently, including the use of video interviews for shortlisting. The CEO agreed that PAS would do a review of the options available to effectively manage the large numbers applying for general service campaigns in a fair and consistent manner.

The CEO updated the Board on developments in relation to ED&I, including the identification of an external Chair for the project group to drive the implementation of the ED&I Strategy, and ongoing discussions with the proposed Chair.

The CEO provided an update on Medical Consultant recruitment; with a total of 81 posts received for advertising in 2020 (a 6% increase on 2019); 87 posts have been advertised to date in 2020 (an 8% increase on 2019); 90 shortlisting and main boards have been held to date in 2020 (a decrease of 30% on 2019). It was noted that a total of 12 shortlisting and main boards were held in September, with 8 candidates recommended in the same month; 64 candidates were recommended to date in 2020 (a decrease of 41% on 2019).

The Board noted that a draft report has just been received from the NDTP and it was agreed that PAS will follow up on this directly with the HSE and will update the Board on progress at the next meeting. It was agreed that this is a very specialist area of recruitment and it is critical that the PAS gets the recruitment process right, given the nature of the posts.

The Board discussed the proposed promotion work for the AGS and acknowledged that PAS has completed all of its areas of work and cannot proceed until the Regulations have been agreed by the Department and the AGs, and are signed by the Minister.

### Financial Position

The Board noted the Financial Report circulated in advance of the meeting. The CEO informed the Board that expenditure to date has varied from the budget, notably in the areas of Payroll, Advertising/Testing and Interview Boards, primarily due to changes to work processes and practices resulting from the Covid19 situation. She highlighted the forecast overspend on payroll costs, which has been reported to DPER since mid-year, despite all efforts to contain the costs; a request for approval in principle of a virement from non-pay allocation to cover this has been submitted to DPER. It was noted that expenditure on goods and services required in response to the Covid 19 situation are estimated to be €173k, and these have been funded from the Non-Pay allocation (due to savings in other areas). The CEO highlighted that the impact of the change to remote working on the staff costs are more difficult to quantify, but the changes in assessment and interview processes have led to an increase in workload in recruitment teams which is unsustainable without additional staff resources.

The Board noted that the audit of the 2019 Appropriation Accounts was completed with no findings to be reported.

The CEO informed the Board that the process for estimates for 2021 was extremely challenging due to the broader national economic pressures as well as the internal operational pressures expected within PAS. It was noted that the overall allocation for 2021 was an increase of 2% from 2020 and that PAS was partially successful in the request for additional staff resources (+6%) for 2021; this allocation was given to deal with the increased activity levels, specifically for Covid priority recruitment. The CEO advised the Board that the increase is not sufficient to cover the full additional cost of the proposed increased activity, and that discussions on the allocation for non-pay costs are ongoing. The Board noted that the capital allocation for 2021 has been reduced to €1.8m, and the proposed schedule of costs for the Chapter House Upgrade will fully utilise this allocation; when taken with an estimated capital carry-forward of €200k into 2021, it should be adequate to meet the capital requirements for the year, subject to careful management and cooperation from OPW. The CEO stated that funding of Recruitment Advertising, Testing and Interview costs, is of greater concern and this will be a key point for discussion at the budget review meeting with DPER in early November, due to the increased number of candidates which have to be tested for a range of campaigns, and the return of interviews on-site potentially at some stage in 2021. The allocation in A2 does not take into account the costs for the range of additional recruitment that PAS has been asked to undertake by the HSE.

The CEO updated the Board on correspondence received from the Audit Committee Chair in relation to the risks involved due to the delay in updating the current version of Agresso. The Board noted that a request for approval of the project had been submitted to OGCIO, as required by DPER, and that the project will get underway immediately.

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

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous Audit Committee meeting would be included with the audit committee update for all future meetings. The Board noted the two audit reports which had been circulated in advance. The Board agreed that the report on Risk Management was positive. They noted that the Audit Committee had noted that there were legacy issues which had impacted on the Accounting and Reporting audit but that there were recommendations which should have been implemented following the previous audit. The current PAS Accountant provided an update to the Board on how she is implementing the recommendations and addressing legacy issues which existed when she took on the role. She stated that all the recommendations were agreed and all are in the process of being implemented, including the documentation of some policies and procedures, and the development of additional reports. She also provided an update for the Board on meetings with the external service provider who will be assisting with the Agresso upgrade. The Board welcomed the fact that all of the recommendations are being progressed and should be addressed within the agreed timescales.

### **Update on Marketing and Communications**

Aine Gallagher, Marketing and Communications Lead, gave a presentation to the Board on recent developments in Marketing and Communications since she took over the role in March. This included an overview of the unit objectives, and the new approach to recruitment advertising, including examples of the approach in practice. She also updated the Board on work underway on the Marketing Strategy and brand development. She also highlighted the new Schools Advertising Challenge and the support the unit are providing to strategy implementation. The Board welcomed Aine to the organisation. The Board agreed that it had been a very comprehensive and impressive overview and congratulated the team on the significant progress to date. The Board welcomed the ongoing development of the Marketing and Communications team and the work on succession planning.

The Board also passed on their positive feedback to those involved in organising the Strategy launch.

### **Corporate Risk Register – Executive Summary of Corporate Risks and Update on Key Risk Area of Resource Management**

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register and the Executive Summary of Corporate Risks, which had been circulated in advance. The Board also noted the additional information provided on the key resourcing related risk. The Board agreed that it was helpful to drill down into the key risks in the Executive Summary. The Board also agreed to review a key risk area at each meeting as identified by the Audit Committee.

### **Board Evaluation**

The Board agreed that the Consultant conducting the Board evaluation should be invited to the next meeting to present the Report.

### **Next meeting**

To be arranged for December.