

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 10.30am on 24th June 2024

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

Apologies: Mr. Colin Menton, Ms. Fiona Quinn.

**Attended virtually.*

The Board held a meeting without the executive present to discuss the results of the annual Board self-assessment and other matters. The Chair agreed to update the CEO on relevant matters raised at a later stage; he noted that there were no areas of concern raised but some suggestions were made for enhancing the arrangements in 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. The CEO updated the Board on areas where the delivery targets have not been achieved. This included four campaigns outside the KPIs on the TLAC side with three delayed due to difficulties sourcing board members; two of these related to the Xmas period and one related to sourcing an external expert; the CEO noted that the fourth campaign was also delayed due to sourcing board members but it was for the Assistant Secretary, DFA competition which had particularly large numbers for multiple vacancies, with the selection process spread over a number of days for each stage. The CEO noted that delays for State Boards campaigns were due to a number of factors over the ten campaigns, including extensions of closing dates due to low numbers of applications, and the unavailability of both client and external nominees. It was noted that on the SER side, three of the delayed campaigns were just outside the KPI, a number were outside the KPI due to the Xmas period and there were a number of difficulties in the campaign for An Bord Pleanála (with a range of expertise required on the board making it difficult to get the board together); in two campaigns the client nominee was unavailable for over a month and the client could not provide an alternative.

The CEO informed the Board that there has been a reduction of 25% in the number of requests for general grades and P&T for the period January to May vs the same period in 2023; there was also a significant reduction in assignments relating to the Justice area. She also outlined that the average time from vacancy request to assignment has decreased by 43% in January to May 2024 vs the same period in 2023.

The CEO updated the Board on the ongoing work on refining the KPIs and what is included in each one; informing the Board that that the organisation will have a more nuanced view of the data later in the year in line with the KPI work that is underway. It was noted that receiving requests in advance of competitions negatively effects the KPI but clients are encouraged to put in their request early as it helps with planning the numbers to be called to interview. The new method of calculating the KPIs will be discussed with the Board at the strategy session in September. The Board reiterated the importance of ensuring the KPIs are measuring factors and timelines within the organisation's control.

The Board also highlighted the importance of including context with the recruitment KPIs and with statistics around the delivery of interviews and assignments, outlining the inputs and outputs and other factors involved. The Board also asked for additional information where KPIs are not being achieved (e.g. general service grades) as to what we are doing on an ongoing basis to mitigate the risks involved. The Board noted that the KPIs in this area are improving and that changes have been made to the process to reduce the timelines but are still below the level required.

The CEO updated the Board on the recent brand launch has noted that there has been good engagement internally and externally. She also provided an update on the centenary event which commenced with an in-person recruiters network focusing on the new brand and how it can help with talent attraction across the public service, the upcoming roll-out of Oleo and the benefits for candidates and clients; and the rollout of the new Capability Framework to date outlining the supports in place for clients. She noted that the afternoon event included the official celebration with a range of clients and former board members and CEOs and noted that there was good engagement with and feedback on the event.

At the meeting in February, 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. The CEO provided an update on this action and informed the Board that this will form part of the new attraction strategy.

It was noted that all of the actions from the last meeting have been implemented or are on the agenda for this meeting.

Risk Management

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

The CEO provided an update on some data protection risks. She informed the Board that a staff member accessed STAR to find out information on a colleague; this led to disciplinary action and the staff member no longer works in the organisation. She informed the Board that a special Town Hall was called to discuss the incident and the expected behaviours, this was led by the CEO and the DPO; it was noted that staff were also surveyed about this type of behaviour, and the results would indicate that it is not a widespread issue. The CEO noted that it was reassuring that the EO who reported this was a relatively new staff member. She informed the Board that changes are being implemented in STAR to reinforce the requirement that STAR can only be used for business purposes.

The CEO informed the Board that the DPO has engaged with the Head of Digital and Strategy in relation to her concerns as to the lack of sign-off from the DPO in relation to the DPIA for Oleo in advance of contract signing which is technically a breach of privacy by design; the DPO does not consider this to be insurmountable as the organisation is taking steps to assure itself in relation to the data protection safeguards in place for this project and

there has been ongoing engagement about data protection with the supplier and with the data lead on the project and GT but it is a technical breach.

The CEO also informed the Board that there is also engagement in relation to the use of technology to record meetings as a pilot had taken place without a full DPIA being completed; no further tests will take place until the DPIA has been completed. She noted that a DPIA is required for google analytics and the Head of Marketing is due to bring this to Management Board.

The Board agreed that if the organisation is planning on recording interviews that consideration should be given to a range of risks and factors around this and suggested getting legal advice or guidance before proceeding.

The Board asked if risk 10 in relation to talent attraction had been rated too low; the CEO informed the Board that this is more of a risk at lower grades and that this rating does adequately reflect the overall risk as the vast majority of vacancies are filled. It was agreed that at the session in September that a report would be provided on the filling of vacancies across all areas of recruitment.

Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Report was included with the Board papers.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the positive reports provided; it was noted that the Audit Committee meeting had been cancelled so that the reports haven't yet been considered by the Committee. The Board also noted that the Strategic Audit Plan for 2025-27 is under development and that the Board can also feed into this process before the final plan is approved by the Audit Committee.

Annual Review of Audit and Assurance Arrangements and Review of Governance and Culture Report

The Board noted the changes to the Audit and Assurance Arrangements and agreed to discuss the areas identified for consideration in the Review of Governance and Culture Report at the meeting in September.

Key Risk Area: P&T Recruitment

Sandra Cairns* and Eimear O'Connor made a presentation to the Board on this key risk area. It outlined the measures already in place and those planned to improve delivery in this area. The Board highlighted the importance of only measuring what the organisation can control and welcomed the engagement with clients to ensure that they understand their role throughout the recruitment process.

Nova Project Update

Andrea Wilson* made a presentation to the Board on developments with this project. Sandra Cairns* and John Norton* also attended. Andrea outlined developments to date and the future schedule for the roll out. The Board agreed that the update was very encouraging, that it provided good assurance on the project roll out and agreed that a staged roll out seems appropriate. The Board welcomed the opportunities it is presenting to change processes and learn from Oleeo's experiences elsewhere. The Board noted that usage of STAR had been extended but that the ongoing reliance on it would be reduced from October when Oleeo is rolled out; they welcomed the assurances from an IT perspective that it could be extended and noted that there would be additional costs involved. The Board agreed that it would be useful to see screenshots of the system at the meeting in September.

Capacity Review Report Actions

The Board noted the actions arising from Phase I. It was noted that the costs of Phase II have increased, which may necessitate a procurement exercise or an alternative approach. It was noted that the Management Board would be considering this further and would update the Board on this matter.

Next meeting and AOB

It was agreed that the current Management Board would review its name to avoid confusion with the Public Appointments Service Board and selection boards.

It was agreed that the meeting in September would be rearranged as the date doesn't suit all Board Members and that a separate strategy session meeting would be organised for the same day in the afternoon.