

PPS Management Board

10.00am Friday 15 September 2023

Belfast Chambers

Members: Stephen Herron
Michael Agnew
Marianne O’Kane
David Best
Glenn Houston
Peter Luney
JoAnne Quinn

In Attendance: Tom Murphy (Private Office)
Claire Harrison (Comms)
Catherine Shannon NICSHR
Chris Smart NICSHR
Will Young NICSHR
Michael Cooke NICSHR

Secretariat: Policy and Information Unit

1. Welcome.

Mr Herron welcomed members and the representatives from NICSHR to the September 2023 Management Board.

2. NICSHR

Mr Herron thanked the representatives of NICSHR for attending and providing the Board with an opportunity to outline the ongoing challenges with resource management.

Ms Shannon advised that she has recently taken over the role of HR Strategic Director and her priority in these recent months has been to stabilise the service. As part of this, there are plans to transform the service provided by introducing a new operating model and closer working partnerships with Departments to ensure an end-to-end service tailored for each Department.

Mr Luney outlined specific areas causing concern for the Board, including the high level of reliance on agency staff, the increasing number of temporary appointments in place across the organisation, delays in competitions to fill vacancies, challenges with CTC clearance and the ongoing service available for staff wellbeing and resilience and provisions to manage absence levels and employee relations.

Mr Smart gave a summary of the process involved in filling vacancies and advised that the dashboard reports provide a greater insight and ability to map vacancies. An overview was provided of the position of the 71 current vacancies in the PPS, and members were advised that 75% of these have been allocated for consideration. Ms Shannon acknowledged that there are some structural delays in the process, including the fact that posts need to be cleared through P&OD before being passed across to Resourcing. She indicated her intention that all these functions would be consolidated under her leadership, to speed up the process. Mr Luney also indicated that while he understood the need for new posts to be subject to this initial scrutiny, he saw less need for vacancies in existing posts to be processed that way and Ms Shannon agreed.

Mr Young advised of the plans to implement a proactive approach to sickness absence management which will include data analysis to inform referrals to various services. Ms O’Kane highlighted ongoing pressures, particularly in OHS, have resulted in a less responsive service which is having a detrimental impact in supporting staff return to work. Mr Young advised of a pilot for a wraparound service, tailored with specific interventions, which is being rolled out in several Departments. It was agreed that PPS could be involved in the pilot to test this concept and operating model. It is also planned to review existing learning and development to ensure line managers have the appropriate support, training and skills to manage sickness absence effectively. Mr Luney asked if NICSHR had messaging around this new wraparound service that could be shared with PPS.

Mr Cooke provided an overview of the new arrangements where business partner teams are no longer working in silos and are now working across functions. Members discussed the need to have appropriate and timely measures in place to support staff and protect wellbeing and welfare.

Members raised the potential of having service level agreement and targets in place to give more accountability and transparency over the service being provided by NICSHR. Ms Shannon agreed that this would be desirable and indicated that NICSHR are working to develop a better scheme of metrics to establish the current baseline. This baseline would then be used to establish performance improvement targets and to get to a point where SLAs with Departments would be developed.

Ms Shannon advised that NICSHR is content to provide progress updates and report back to the Board as required. Members agreed that this would be beneficial, and that attendance should be scheduled on an annual basis, or sooner if required.

AP 07-23/24 Mr Luney to invite NICSHR to attend the Management Board on an annual basis, or sooner if required.

Mr Herron queried whether any information was available or if there are plans to conduct a central evaluation on New Ways of Working. Ms Shannon advised that discussions are ongoing regarding the need to review/recalibrate the policy and that the interest expressed by PPS would be reported back to the Permanent Secretary. Members also highlighted that PPS are not represented at the Permanent Secretaries meeting and it would be desirable if PPS could attend these meetings, if not as a full member then in an observer capacity. Members also asked Ms Shannon to ensure that Mr Luney was routinely copied on Perm Sec papers issuing from NICSHR.

3. Apologies

None

4. Declaration of Board Members' Interests

None.

5. Management Board Minutes.

The previous minutes were agreed.

6. Actions from the Management Board Meeting of June 2023

AP 05-23/24 Mr Luney to inform stakeholders that BCS will be consulting and provide the presentation slides for their information.

Closed. Information circulated to stakeholders. Mr Luney updated members on the progress of the Board Effectiveness Review. A draft copy of the Report has been circulated internally for comment, with several areas highlighted for improvement. BCS will present their findings to the next Management Board.

AP 06-23/24 Mr Luney to provide more detail on the other projects.

Closed. See item 8. Information on priority and potential future projects has been set out in the Project Dashboard.

7. Reports from Management Board Committees.

Senior Management Group 11 September 2023.

Mr Agnew updated members on the matters discussed at the Senior Management Group Meeting of 11 September 2023.

Members were advised of the change in position in respect of funding; £600k of anticipated funding from DOJ is now not forthcoming as it was considered to have been included in the baseline allocation. Consequently, this has increased the projected shortfall in the budget.

An update was provided on the redeployment of resources to the Belfast and Eastern Region. Other matters discussed included vacancy management and the impact this is having on unallocated work queues and staff morale. Figures reported on sickness absence are causing concern, and it is noted that PPS is currently recording the highest levels of absence in the NICS. It has been agreed that a log should be compiled to record activities to promote wellbeing, including a list of interventions to identify and focus on welfare and resilience activities available. It is noted that welfare and resilience has now been assigned as a standalone risk on the Risk Register.

People and Resources Committee – 30 June 2023 & 7 September 2023

Mr Luney provided an overview of the matters discussed at both meetings.

Members were briefed on concerns raised at the meeting of 30 June 2023 regarding the PPS Resourcing Submission paper and particularly making additional resources available for modernisation when operational areas are under significant pressure.

Members were updated on the provision of support for staff in welfare and resilience. Members noted that due to resourcing pressures PRRT may be unable to deliver all the services that had been sought. RMT are continuing to explore options with PRRT and Inspire.

Mr Luney advised of discussions held with the TUS representatives at the recent Whitley meeting. TUS raised concerns around the pressures of work, workloads, performance, staff morale and welfare and resilience. TUS were advised that there is a finite budget available which places limitations on the ability to increase resourcing capacity. An overview of the Modernisation Project was provided detailing plans to reduce demand, including the streamlining of processes in an effort to ease pressures on staff.

8. Strategic Improvement Board

Strategic Improvement Dashboard August 2023

Mr Agnew updated members on the progress of the key projects.

Members were advised that SIB have approved the commencement of a Pilot of the No Prosecution letter by email. A number of changes to the SOC/PIF are with PSNI to progress, however due to ongoing resourcing pressures a timescale

cannot be provided for completion. An ICT change is also required internally and again due to competing priorities a timescale is not available.

The first phase of RECs project delivery is close to completion with the formal opening in a few weeks. A Staff Instruction is currently being finalised.

In respect of the DEMS project, an issue has been raised by the Bar Library regarding the use of personal devices by counsel in Crown Court to display digital evidence. The concern is around the risk that personal data on these devices may be inadvertently displayed in the court. PPS are currently liaising with the NICTS and Bar Library to find a resolution to this matter.

The Content Manager project is behind schedule, with issues in resourcing a main factor in the delay. The rollout plans have been rescheduled, and phase two roll out to the Newry office has been completed. Assurances have been received from IT Assist that there is no risk to the retention of emails arising from the delay.

The Board members discussed and noted the potential future projects outlined in the dashboard.

9. Performance Summary.

Board members reviewed and discussed the Monthly Performance Summary, as of August 2023.

The overall caseload awaiting a decision at the end of August had increased by approximately 26% on the August 2022 baseline, with Belfast and Eastern recording the highest increase. The number of decisions issued during the financial year to date was higher than the corresponding baseline to August, with an increase of 2.2%.

Mr Herron expressed concerns about the latest figures in respect of unallocated work, highlighting the potential for an increase in the victim attrition rates. Ms O’Kane outlined steps that are being taken to address the current volume of cases in Belfast & Eastern, including the use of overtime, the redeployment of staff from other regions and the return of temporary staff on loan back to the region. Performance issues are being closely managed and monitored and these will be discussed with the ADs at the upcoming PAMS.

Members agreed that a specific, radical and robust Action Plan is required for Belfast region to manage and control the escalating workloads. The plan should include a breakdown of cases to assist with triaging, focusing on higher risk cases including those which have vulnerable victims, remand cases and the oldest cases.

Mr Luney outlined several factors that are impacting performance, in particular the increased complexity of cases, the number of vacancies and high sickness absence levels. Discussions will be held with the ADs at the forthcoming planning event to generate new and innovative ideas to address backlogs.

Ms O’Kane provided an update on the SCU region and reported that performance figures have remained very favourable. A paper on the long-term resourcing of the section will be presented to SMG for their consideration in advance of the next Board.

New Ways of Working

Mr Luney advised that a series of 1 to 1 meetings are being held with ADs and Business Managers to review and discuss the evaluation of the New Ways of Working. The assurances provided from each of the business areas will be explored and considerations will be given to whether current arrangements are meeting business needs and requirements. The draft report will be shared with TUS.

Reducing Demand Update

Ms O’Kane provided members with an update on proposals to reform file submission arrangements. Discussions are ongoing with PSNI to agree operational arrangements and some initial stakeholder engagement has taken place. A pilot is scheduled to commence in coming months with evaluation checks on a quarterly basis to facilitate both quantitative and qualitative analysis and feedback.

10. Finance Update

Executive Summary

Members reviewed and discussed the key financial issues being managed by the Finance Team as of 31 July.

Ms Quinn informed members that the 2023/24 budget allocation of £36.2m included the £600k funding which had previously been anticipated from DOJ. Current revised forecast in light of the new budget position would now show an outturn adverse to budget with a projected pressure of £1m.

Overall spending year to date is as anticipated, a review of the salary costs and pay award has reduced expenditure by £400k and there are a few other pockets of expenditure that may reduce, including counsel fees. The additional overtime and allocation of funding to fill vacancies are all included in the existing forecast. Mr Luney outlined that DOF Supply is aware of our pressures and there may be scope to submit bids for funding for the modernisation project.

Ms Quinn advised members of an issue which has been raised by the Audit Office in respect of the accrual for counsel fees. It is considered that the figure for the accrual is not reflective and therefore a review will be required on how this is calculated.

Members were updated on the Draft Report to those Charged with Governance. The Audit Office have raised several queries, and these are being dealt with however, there are challenges arising from resourcing pressures in the Finance Team and the requirement for separation of duties within the team. It is anticipated the draft report will be with the Audit Committee for 27th September, and this will be shared with Board members.

11. People

NICS HR Summary Report September 2023

Members reviewed and discussed the September 2023 NICS HR Report, including the latest staffing position, vacancies and recruitment, employee relations, and performance management.

12. Governance Issues.

Corporate Risk Register 2023/24

Members reviewed and discussed the 2023/24 Risk Register and noted the planned actions, mitigations, status, and rating of all risks.

Mr Luney highlighted the controls in place to mitigate Risk 11, and these will be the subject of further discussion at SMG.

ARC Update

Mr Houston advised that the next meeting of ARC will be on 27 September when Committee expects to receive the 2022/23 NIAO findings and recommendations, including the Draft Report to Those Charged with Governance and Letter of Representation.

Mr Houston updated members on the outcome of the most recent internal Audit Report on Corporate Governance, which had been previously circulated. Members noted that the rating was satisfactory, with one Priority 3 recommendation which has been accepted by Management.

The matter of data protection and cyber security was discussed, with particular reference to how Fol requests are handled, noting the recent unintended PSNI disclosure which has had catastrophic consequences. Consideration is being

given to inviting ICT/ESS for an assessment of the issue of data protection and arrangements in place to avoid a similar occurrence in PPSNI.

13. AOB

PPS 2030 Resourcing Submission

Mr Luney updated members on the set-up phase of the Modernisation project 2030 and advised a wider business case will be developed in due course. Members were briefed on concerns raised at the PRC meeting regarding the investment of resources in this team, in the context that front line staff are under pressure. They queried whether investment and spend on modernisation is a priority. PRC approved the bid in principle, however requested that their concerns were presented to MB.

Members discussed the easements that the Modernisation Project will deliver and agreed to formally approve the business case.

14. Communication Update.

Ms Harrison provided a verbal update on data and feedback from the recent staff engagement events.

Communication Planner.

The Board Members discussed and reviewed the Communications Planner and update.

15. Next Meeting.

The next Management Board will take place on the 25 October 2023 at 10.00 am in Belfast Chambers.

Summary of Action Points arising from Management Board.

Meeting of 15 September 2023

<i>AP 07-23/24</i>	<i>Mr Luney to invite NICSHR to attend the Management Board on an annual basis, or sooner if required.</i>
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Action Points carried over from previous meetings.

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