

Minutes of Youth Justice Agency Management Board Meeting

Wednesday 26 January 2026

Woodlands JJC, Bangor

Board present: Stephen Martin

Mary Aughey

Paul Gibson

Colleen Heaney

Richard Horton

Thomas Moore

In attendance: Nicola Mullan

Claire Taylor

Geoffrey Troughton

Trudy Brown

Angela Gregg

Elaine McConnell

APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

None. Stephen welcomed Angela and Geoffrey to their first Board meeting.

ITEM 1: DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No conflicts of interest were declared.

ITEM 2: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous Board meeting on 26 November 2025 were agreed. All actions were noted as complete or were scheduled for consideration at future meetings.

ITEM 3: UPDATE ON STRATEGIC MATTERS

The Board noted the CEO's strategic report which included confirmation the Finance Minister had published a draft multiyear budget to the Northern Ireland Executive on 6 January. While the position on the Agency's budget was not known at this stage, it was expected the budget when allocated would not include any increases for inflation or growth and would therefore require careful prioritisation particularly in years two and three to remain within budget.

Stephen's report confirmed he had met with colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss the development of a first draft paper, for future Ministerial consideration, on broad proposals for a new Arm's Length Body, the Children's and Families Agency. While this work at an early stage, Stephen agreed to update the Board as this project progressed.

Stephen also provided a verbal update on his meeting with the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) on 22 January 2026. An announced inspection of Woodlands JJC had been due to take place in 2026, but this has been rescheduled and a new date is to be set. This decision had been taken by CJI based on the findings from their annual unannounced inspections of Woodlands JJC and the facility being deemed as lower risk.

ITEM 4: DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

The Board noted the report provided by Mary which included an update on the children who were currently in custody and progress with the JJC refurbishment programme.

Her report confirmed a night staff recruitment competition was due to launch in February 2026. It also noted the contribution which everyone in the centre had made to the Autism NI Christmas Fayre Charity fundraiser. The Board noted their thanks to Nicky for all her work in coordinating this event.

Mary concluded her report with confirmation that a second member of her staff had recently received their qualification in Social Work through the Open University

sponsorship provided by the Agency. The Board offered their congratulations to Deborah Kelly on achieving a first in her social work degree.

ITEM 5: YJA WORKFORCE PLAN UPDATE

The Board noted the update on progress (as of 31 December 2025) which Stephen had provided on delivery of the twenty-one actions contained in the Agency's Workforce Plan. The Board noted plans for a report on findings from staff exit surveys to be presented to them at the March Board meeting. They also took note that a three-year YJA Learning and Development Plan was scheduled to be presented to them at their August meeting, and a further update on progress of delivery of the YJA Workforce Plan was scheduled for October 2026.

Action: Colleen to provide a report on findings from staff exit surveys for the March 2026 Board meeting.

ITEM 6: WORKLOAD TRENDS

Stephen introduced the paper he and Trudy prepared on the emerging trends in the YJA's workload over the period April 2021 to March 2025. Trudy confirmed (as with the previous year's paper) the 2021/22 year had been taken as the baseline year for this report as the 2020/21 year had included the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown periods and so, in many ways, is atypical.

Following an analysis of the YJA Annual Workload statistics, produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and qualitative feedback from the Agencies Assistant Directors and Directors the following key issues had been identified for inclusion in the Agency's business plan for 2026/27:

- a re-focus on informal /earlier stage diversion from the justice system, including for care experienced children who (based on the limited data available) seem more likely to 'jump' straight into the formal system;

- adding a particular focus on care experienced girls to our work on understanding and addressing the needs of girls in the justice system; and
- further improving our collection of equality data and reducing the number of 'unknowns.' Richard queried if the Agency was sufficiently resourced to take on work on earlier stage diversion. Stephen explained that recent difficulties in staff resources had meant that more of the focus of Youth Justice Services (YJS) had been on statutory work. However, as the resourcing situation was starting to improve, the Agency was keen to re-focus on their earlier stage diversion work as it was key to the Agency's Model of Practice and the Child First way of working.

This did not mean the Agency had the resources to do everything they wanted in this area of work but did mean they could re-focus some resources to key aspects of this work. Colleen also confirmed a recruitment competition for Youth Conference Coordinators (YCCs) was planned in the coming weeks, to address current vacancies in YJS.

The Board noted the paper and confirmed they were content to agree the recommendation to include the three key issues identified in the Agency's business plan for 2026/27.

ITEM 7: JJC MONITORING REPORTS

The Board noted the Independent Monitoring Reports prepared by Austin Treacy, following his visits to the JJC on 30 September 2025 and 31 October 2025.

ITEM 8: PERFORMANCE MONITORING

(a) HR REPORT

The Board noted the report provided by the NICS HR Business Partner, Nicola Mullan. Her report provided an update on recruitment plans to fill vacancies for Youth Conferencing Co-Ordinator, Night Support Worker, EO2 Non-Qualified Care Worker, EO1 Qualified Care Worker, and SO Senior Practitioner. Nicola also discussed plans to fill a number of administrative vacancies across the agency.

Nicola provided an update on the 2024/25 DoJ Absence Report, published on 20 January 2026. She noted that while there had been a marginal reduction in sickness absence levels compared with the previous year, the report highlighted the continued high levels of sickness absence across the Agency. In particular, she drew attention to the significant impact that long-term sickness cases was having on the overall figure.

Stephen acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that sickness absence has been added as a standing agenda item at the monthly Directors' meetings. He added that HR would be invited to attend future meetings to ensure a clear and timely escalation process is in place to address any issues that arise.

Nicola also provided an update on a piece of work being taken forward by the NICS Mental Health Forum, focused on identifying gaps in the current sources of support available to staff in relation to mental health. She outlined four potential improvement options to address these gaps: establishing a centralised Mental Health Hub, developing a similar resilience and CBT sessions, similar to those currently offered by external providers, introducing designated "time out" for staff to attend wellbeing sessions, and enhancing wellbeing toolkits for line managers.

Nicola concluded her report by updating that L&D were due to launch an Explore Leadership Programme at the start of February 2026 for staff at EO1 and EO2 grades.

(b) FINANCE REPORT

The Board noted the report provided by Claire Taylor which provided details on the year-to-date expenditure against budget, and a forecast for the 2025/26 year-end position. Claire confirmed indications for the 2026/27 YJA budget was that it was going to be a 'flat budget'.

The Board offered their congratulations to Claire on her promotion and thanked her for all her work with the Agency.

(c) GOVERNANCE REPORT

The Board noted the Governance Report without further comment.

(d) RISK REGISTER

Following consideration, the Board agreed minor amendments to the key controls and actions planned for Risk 1 and 2.

Action: Maria to amend Risk Register.

(e) COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Board noted the contents of the report which summarised details of the charity fundraising activity which had taken across the Agency during December 2025 and the update on the process for selecting a new charity partner for 2026.

(f) COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS UPDATE

The Board noted the content of the report and the position regarding complaints received.

(g) ESTATES, PROCUREMENT & IT UPDATE

The Board noted the report which was provided and noted that a schedule for the renewal of office leases had been prepared and would be taken forward as the year progressed.

(h) BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

The Board noted the plan had been tested during Operation Pegasus and no changes had been required. A final report from Operation Pegasus was due to be issued later in the year, and if required amendments would be made to the Business Continuity Plan.

((j) MANAGEMENT BOARD SCHEDULE OF PAPERS 2026

The Board noted the detail in schedule and confirmed no amendments were required.

ITEM 10: BOARD EVALUATION

Attendees noted the meeting had been well structured, and informative.

ITEM 11: AOB

None.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

YJA Offices, Foyle Wednesday 4 March 2026 at 10.00am.

TABLE OF ACTION POINTS CONTAINED IN BOARD MINUTES 28 JANUARY 2026

Page	Action	Lead	Status
3	Provide a report on findings from staff exit surveys for the March 2026 Board meeting.	C. Heaney	Actioned.
5	Amend Risk Register.	M. Gourley	Actioned.