

# LSANI BOARD MINUTES

## Board Meeting: Tuesday 24 March 2026

**Attendees:** Paul Andrews (Chair)  
John McDaid (Non-Executive Member)  
Paul Mageean (Non-Executive Member)  
Kerry McGill (Director of Corporate Services)  
Judith Clarke (Director of Operations)  
Steven Allison (Deputy Director of EAJD)  
Gillian O’Kane (FSD)  
Julia Walsh (ARAU)  
Jill Wharry (CARB)

**Secretariat:** Denver Nugent

### **1. Apologies**

1.1 None.

### **2. Declarations and conflicts of interest**

2.1 None.

### **3. Minutes of previous meeting**

3.1 Minutes of previous meeting agreed as accurate.

### **4. Actions arising from previous meeting**

4.1 The one outstanding action point, the development of a paper on the cost of cases, work will be completed alongside the work to produce the official statistics. The estimated completion date is June 2026.

## **5. NEBM/ Chief Executive update (Items 5 & 6 taken together)**

### **6. EAJD report**

- 6.1 SA provided an update on the Criminal Bar Association strike (CBA), noting that agreement had been reached on the refresher pilot.
- 6.2 SA outlined discussions on a Crown Court pilot for written work to the Court and the Accelerated Review which had a reporting date of 27 April.
- 6.3 SA noted that the Minister approved the issue of discussion papers looking at structural reform of Legal Aid, including financial eligibility.
- 6.4 On Taxation reform SA indicated that an amendment had been tabled to the Justice Bill which will give EAJD the powers to introduce hourly rates for barristers.
- 6.5 There was a general discussion on the implication of the ongoing strike and the impact on the bills submitted to the Agency.

**SA left the meeting.**

## **7. Finance**

### *Finance Report and Budget*

- 7.1 The Board noted the Finance paper.
- 7.2 GOK noted that circa £1m of underspend in salaries and income has been declared and there was a balance of £1.6m in the Legal Aid fund with unassessed bills of circa £1.7m.
- 7.3 JC commented on the unassessed bills and highlighted that all reviews in relation to the Exceptionality Judgment had been completed.
- 7.4 JMcD & PM noted that the year-end position was very positive.
- 7.5 The Board noted that there was no budget confirmed for 2026/27 as yet.

**GO’K left the meeting.**

## **8. Papers to note**

### *Operations Payments Paper*

- 8.1 JC presented the payments report which was noted by the Board.
- 8.2 JC confirmed that all areas are within KPI's.
- 8.3 JC referred the Board to figure 4 on the dashboard and highlighted the impact of a stronger opening budget for 2025/26 on unassessed bills.
- 8.4 There was a discussion around the dashboards and the current positive position of the KPI's for payments.

### *Operations Non-Payments Paper*

- 8.5 JC presented the Operations Non-Payments paper and advised that all KPIs had been met, except for Non-emergency Exceptional Funding. This was due to a combination of low volume and also the reallocation of resource to the Exceptionality Review.
- 8.6 JC highlighted the work of the Information Analysis Unit (IAU) in providing more meaningful MI in respect of messaging on LAMS.
- 8.7 JC confirmed that all decisions had been made in respect of the exceptionality judgement and noted that c£875K has been granted.

### *People Plan and Staff Engagement*

- 8.8 J Walsh and J Wharry joined the meeting and presented a paper on the People Plan and Staff Engagement, outlining the work of the Staff Engagement Forum.
- 8.9 J Walsh provided details of successful events and activities organised by the forum and outlined planned future initiatives.
- 8.10 The Board noted the positive work being done and thanked Jill and Julia for their presentation.

## **J W and J W left the meeting**

*Corporate Services Paper including HR Report*

- 8.11 KMcG presented the Corporate Services and HR Report and highlighted that there were currently 20 vacancies. KMcG noted that the Agency were currently awaiting allocation of new staff and therefore the number of vacancies should begin to decrease in the upcoming months.
- 8.12 KMcG noted that annual End of Year reviews had commenced with a target completion date of 30 April and that development plans and performance appraisals will be created for all staff for the upcoming year.
- 8.13 KMcG referred the Board to the four Assembly Questions received since the previous meeting. There was a discussion around the Assembly Questions.
- 8.14 KMcG provided an update on LAMS changes and noted the changes recently deployed and those due to be developed in the upcoming months.
- 8.15 KMcG provided an update on the official statistics and confirmed that a high-level document will be published in June with a more detailed document published in the Autumn.
- 8.16 KMcG provided an update on a planning meeting the Agency had with NIAO in January and noted the draft Audit Strategy presented to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC); significant risks remained the same as prior years.
- 8.17 KMcG confirmed that work has commenced on the preparation of Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) and the first draft had been returned within the required timelines. KMcG noted that a further version will be updated before presentation to NEMs at the end of April.
- 8.18 KMcG provided a high-level overview of internal audit reports and noted that all six had been completed with each receiving a satisfactory marking.
- 8.19 KMcG noted that the Internal Audit Plan for next year had been agreed and will be presented at the next ARC.
- 8.20 KMcG provided an overview of the Fraud and Error initiative, noting that 92% of the sample had been completed. Early indicators show an official error rate of

3.2% and a practitioner fraud and error rate of 7.6%. Excluding non-compliance, the rate reduces to 3.7%.

## **9. Corporate Governance**

### *Performance against Business Plan 2025-2026 Targets*

- 9.1 The performance against the business plan was noted by the Board.
- 9.2 JC provided detail on the new Rep Lower applications checklist which has been published and noted that a communications survey will be issued to practitioners by the end of the year.

### *Corporate Risk Register*

- 9.3 PA provided an update on the Corporate Risk Register and noted that the budget risk has been amended to reflect the potential underspend.
- 9.4 PA noted that the risk register will be revised ahead of the next financial year.

### *Key Risk – Information Security*

- 9.5 The Board discussed the risk, and PA highlighted the declarations of interest form that staff are required to complete and submit each year and mandatory security awareness training run by ICT.

### *Terms of Reference - Board*

- 9.6 The Board agreed the revised Terms of Reference.

### *Terms of Reference - ARC*

- 9.7 The Board noted that revised Terms of Reference for the ARC had been agreed and would be considered at the next ARC meeting.

### *Board Effectiveness*

- 9.8 There was a discussion around the Board Effectiveness and the assessment ratified.

*Readout from the Audit and Risk Committee*

9.9 The Board noted the readout from the ARC.

**10. Message from Board for staff**

10.1 The Board reviewed the current LSA financial position recognising the significant challenges faced this year. The Board commended staff for their strong performance throughout the year and their efforts to ensure the budget was effectively utilised. The Board welcomed the update provided by Julia Walsh and Jill Wharry on work carried out by the Staff Engagement Forum and the People Plan. The Board noted the positive progress being made.

**11. AOB**

11.1 PA noted that Deborah Brown was moving to the Department of Finance.

*Meeting ended 12.55pm*

**Date of next meeting 26 May 2026 at 10.00am**