LSANI Board Minutes

Board Meeting: Tuesday 26 May 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)

Gillian O'Kane (FSD)

Waiki Mo (CFU)

Deborah Brown

Secretariat: Denver Nugent

1. Apologies

1.1 Apologies were noted from Steven Allison.

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, will be completed alongside the work to produce the Official Statistics. The estimated completion date is June 2026.

5. NEM/Chief Executive update on legal challenges.

5.1 PA provided an update on legal challenges.

6. EAJD Report

6.1 PA presented the EAJD report in SA's absence.

6.2 The position with the Accelerated review was noted.

6.3 DB provided an update on the budget position, noting that the Department faces budgetary pressures of £100m and therefore additional funding resulting from the Accelerated Review would be challenging.

6.4 GOK provided detail of the estimated costs of the Accelerated Review findings.

6.5 PA provided an update on the Criminal Bar Association strike (CBA).

6.6 There was a general discussion on the implication of the ongoing strike and the impact on the bills submitted to the Agency.

6.7 PA provided an update on the proposed Taxation changes noting that submissions had been made to the Justice Committee.

6.8 PA provided detail on a paper issued on the classification of cases.

6.9 PA noted that a consultation is currently ongoing in respect of financial eligibility.

6.10 JMcD queried when financial eligibility was last revised. PA confirmed that the last change was made approximately twenty years ago.

7. Finance

Finance Report and Budget

7.1 The Board noted the Finance paper and the Budget summary paper.

7.2 GOK noted that the year-end underspend was c.£60k which equates to 0.05% and was subject to any adjustments arising from the audit.

7.3 GOK confirmed that the 2025/26 audit was ongoing and that work is currently at the fieldwork stage.

7.4 GOK noted that the sample size for the year was larger than in previous years due to the changes resulting from legal aid reform. Initial queries from NIAO were in respect of outliers and closed case population for average costs.

7.5 KMcG provided further detail on the audit position following her meeting with the Audit Manager.

7.6 GOK noted that she will be reviewing the format of the finance paper and confirmed she will issue a draft to the NEM's for their feedback.

7.7 GOK provided an update on the 2026/27 budget position, noting that a budget had not yet been agreed and confirming that the Department had received a contingency envelope.

7.8 DB provided further detail on the Department's budget position and its approach to the contingency envelope, noting that the current position is very challenging.

7.9 There was a general discussion around the budget position and PA confirmed the Agency will continue as business as usual, however there will be no discretionary spend at present until a final budget is agreed.

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 were operating within KPI targets and commended staff for their exceptional performance in managing recent operational changes. These included the implementation of fee increases within LAMS, the processing of back payments arising from the Valliday & Lynch judgment, and the delivery of training for new staff.

8.3 JC noted that the focus for the coming year will remain on reducing official error. Work will be undertaken to identify the root causes of errors and to develop measures to prevent them occurring in the first instance.

8.4 JC noted that payments were continuing to be made and the Agency continued to meet the KPIs.

8.5 JC highlighted that £9.2 million was paid out in April. She advised that the ongoing Criminal Bar strike is impacting payment volumes, with 34% fewer Crown Court bills received compared to the same period in 2025. JC further noted that, reduced bill volumes were limiting opportunities to train new staff in crown court expenses.

8.6 PA noted that it is crucial to get staff trained up for the surge of bills which will be received once the strike ends.

8.7 PM referred to fig 2 and queried the volume of bills compared to the value of bills compared to last year. JC confirmed that the value received this year in April is £8.5m compared to £10.3m last year.

8.8 There was a discussion around the breakdown of payments made to criminal practitioners.

8.9 JC confirmed that the number of queried bills continues to decrease and advised that work remains ongoing to reduce errors within submitted bills. She noted that this was a significant area of work which will require sustained effort and is expected to take time to deliver.

Operations Non-Payments Paper

8.10 JC presented the Operations Non-Payments paper and advised that all KPIs had been met.

8.11 JC noted an increase in the civil applications awaiting adjudication. She advised that this had been anticipated due to resource pressures and confirmed that agency staff, together with staff redeployed from other areas, were being utilised to help address the backlog and improve performance.

8.12 JC provided an update on the Early Resolution Pilot and the uncertified counsel scheme in family cases. She advised that the learning and outcomes arising from the uncertified counsel scheme had informed the development of a Public Law Pilot and outlined the objectives.

8.13 There was a discussion around the certification processes in Public law.

Corporate Services Paper including HR Report

8.14 KMcG presented the Corporate Services and HR Report and highlighted that there were currently 16 vacancies. KMcG confirmed that the Agency had been allocated four new staff since the last meeting and that the number of vacancies should continue to decrease significantly in the upcoming months.

8.15 KMcG noted that annual End of Year reviews had been completed for all staff and the Agency had met the corporate target.

8.16 KMcG advised that she was working with JC on the review of a Training Needs Analysis to inform the development of a Corporate Training Plan.

8.17 KMcG advised that there are no significant concerns regarding sickness absence. While three cases were recorded in the report, this has since reduced to one case. She further noted that none of the absences were work-related.

8.18 KMcG referred the Board to the Assembly Questions received since the previous meeting. There was a discussion around the Assembly Questions.

8.19 KMcG provided an update on the Business Plan and noted that she would incorporate the NEMs feedback prior to submission to the Minister for approval.

8.20 KMcG provided an update on LAMS changes and advised that discussions with CPD, the Contractor and the departmental economist were ongoing to ensure service provision for management of the LAMS System from December 2026.

8.21 KMcG provided an update on practitioner fraud and error. She noted that the largest error category was *fees claimed not evidenced*, accounting for 38% of all identified errors. The second largest category was *files not received*. While the number of cases in this category was relatively low, with only 12 files not received and an overall compliance rate of 99%, the financial value of the payments was high.

8.22 KMcG noted that excluding non-compliance the error rate had increased from 3.8% last year to 5.3% this year.

8.23 KMcG advised that work is ongoing to enhance the analysis of official and practitioner fraud and error, with the aim of providing a more detailed understanding of the underlying causes of errors and supporting practitioners and staff in the development of targeted interventions.

8.24 KMcG provided an update on the Official Statistics and confirmed that a high-level document will be published in the upcoming days with a more detailed document published in the Autumn.

Data Analytics

8.25 Wai Ki Mo joined the meeting and presented a paper on the Agency's Data Analytics Strategy, highlighting the future direction of travel for this area of work. There was discussion around the strategy.

8.26 The Board thanked Wai Ki for his presentation.

9. Corporate Governance

Corporate Risk Register Year End 31 March 2026

9.2 The Board noted the updates.

Corporate Risk Register 2026/2027

9.3 PA provided an update on the 2026/27 Corporate Risk Register and noted that the critical risks will be similar to the previous year. The Board approved the Risk Register.

Key Risk – Budget and Stakeholder Relationships

9.4 The Board discussed the risk and agreed that the rating and narrative accurately reflected the current environment.

Readout from the Audit and Risk Committee

9.5 The Board noted the readout from the ARC.

Stewardship Statement

9.6 The Board noted the year end Stewardship Statement.

10. Message from Board for staff

10.1 The Board reviewed progress against the 2025/26 Business Plan and recognised the strong performance and positive progress made in delivering against agreed targets.

10.2 The 2026/27 budget and overall financial position were discussed; a contingency budget is expected shortly.

10.3 Wai Ki presented the Data Analytics Strategy to the NEMs and highlighted the future direction of travel for this area of work.

10.4 The 2026/27 Corporate Risk Register was adopted by the Board.

10.5 As this was Deborah Brown's final week with the Department, the Board formally acknowledged the significant contribution she has made to the Agency. Her extensive work, dedication, and efforts are sincerely appreciated, and she leaves with the Board's thanks and best wishes for the future. DB reflected on the scale of change she had seen within the Agency during her tenure and the strides that had been made post computerisation and commended all Agency staff for their work.

11. AOB

11.1 None.

Meeting ended at 1.00pm

Date of next meeting: 18 August 2026 at 10.00am