

DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING

- Minutes -

Thursday 23 November 2023 at 10.00 am

Hydebank Wood College

Members:	Richard Pengelly (Chair)	Permanent Secretary
	Deborah Brown	Director, Justice Delivery
	Sean Holland	Director, Access to Justice
	Glyn Capper	Director, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS)
	Beverley Wall	Director, Reducing Offending and Director General, Northern Ireland Prison Service
	Mark Goodfellow	Director, Safer Communities
	Dr Joanne McDowell	Non-Executive Board Member
	Colin Kennedy	Non-Executive Board Member (Remotely)
Apologies:	Clare Dornan	Board Secretary
In attendance:	David Lennox	Head of Corporate Engagement and Communications Division
	Richard Logan	Acting Head of Financial Services Division
	Bill Smyth	Governance Unit (Agenda items 10-12)
	John Napier	Head of Information Services Division (Agenda items 13 and 14)
	Sinead Bell	Deputy Board Secretary

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to Hydebank Wood College and conveyed congratulations to Mark and Glyn on their appointments as Directors following two external recruitment competitions.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1. No additional declarations of interest were noted.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 Draft minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. All actions in-hand.

4. STRATEGIC ISSUES

Permanent Secretary's Update

4.1 The Chair referred to the Budget position and the continued financial challenges facing the Department. The recent recruitment competition for Chief Constable had concluded following appointment of an interim Chief Constable.

Update from Directors

4.2 Mark noted the planned review of the Policing Board and a review of the PSNI Senior Executive Team. Sean also noted that due to budget constraints that unfortunately it would not be possible to proceed with plans to provide a sexual offence legal adviser service to child victims of sexual crimes. Joanne suggested that it would be helpful to record workstreams that could not proceed due to budget constraints for external communication as necessary.

5. FINANCE UPDATE

5.1 Richard Logan provided an update on the Department's 2023-24 budgetary position, future years planning, upgrade of Account NI and preparation of the Whole of Government Accounts. The Board noted the pressures facing the Department. The Chair acknowledged the additional work involved in preparing the Whole of Government Accounts but the outcome reflected positively on the Department. Richard also advised that preparatory work had commenced on planning for the 2024-25 Budget.

5.2 The Board noted the paper.

6. NIPS UPDATE – MANAGEMENT OF A GROWING PRISON POPULATION

6.1 Beverley gave a presentation on the prison population and noted that between March 2021 and November 2023 the prison population had increased from 1401 to 1878. The percentage of daily prison population on remand continues to increase from approximately 25% in 2015/16 to 36% in 2022/23. During October 2023, 80% of committals into custody were remand prisoners.

6.2 Beverley noted that the challenges with an increased population were more acutely felt at Maghaberry but there are also pressures in Magilligan and Hydebank College. This is impacting on ensuring adequate accommodation but also maintaining sufficient staffing levels.

6.3 Beverley noted highlighted a number of priorities brigaded under three themes: prison population, rehabilitation and people. The Chair thanked Beverley for the informative presentation.

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7. PROGRESS AGAINST THE 2023-24 BUSINESS PLAN

7.1 David referred members to the paper circulated on progress against deliverables in the Business Plan up to end September 2023. Of the 40 deliverables within the plan, 25 are being reported with a RAG status of green, 11 are recorded as amber and 4 as red. David noted that performance continues to be impacted by budgetary constraints, staff vacancy levels and the absence of an Executive. The Chair noted the importance of ensuring that, where possible, a focus remains on achieving the deliverables within the plan.

Decision - The Board noted the progress up to 30 September 2023.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

8.1 David referred members to the paper circulated and to the proposed amendments to the Risk Register. As the upgrade of Account NI was completed in September 2023, as planned, it was agreed to remove that from the Issues Log.

Decision – The Board agreed the Department Risk Register and updated Issues Log.

9. UPDATED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST POLICY

9.1 David referred members to the paper which included an updated Conflicts of Interest policy that had previously been considered by the Board together with a practice note. He noted, in particular, the text to explain the updated policy to staff. The Chair noted the importance of ensuring that staff discuss any potential conflicts with line managers and to treat those sensitively.

Decision - The Board agreed the updated policy for circulation to staff.

10. DRAFT MID-YEAR ASSURANCE STATEMENT

10.1 Bill referred members to the Draft Mid-Year Assurance Statement. He highlighted a number of exceptions and explained that if the Board is content the Assurance Statement would be signed off by the Permanent Secretary as Accounting Officer.

Decision - No issues were raised with the Draft Mid-Year Assurance Statement.

11. COMPLAINTS – MID-YEAR REPORT

11.1 Bill explained that 64 complaints had been received by the Department over the period April – September 2023. Bill summarised a breakdown of the complaints across the core Department and Agencies and highlighted the high response rate within the target deadline.

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The Board acknowledged the work done in compiling the report and asked if future reports could include detail on number of individuals submitting complaints as well as trend data, where applicable.

Action: Future reports on complaints received by the Department to include number of complainants and trend data, where applicable.

12. RAISING A CONCERN – MID-YEAR REPORT

12.1 Bill advised that the Department's Raising a Concern policy had been in operation for 18 months. He advised that a triage system is in place for any concerns received to ensure they are dealt with under the appropriate policy. Bill then summarised the report and provided a verbal update on concerns received that were dealt with under other internal policies. The Chair requested that future reports include a breakdown of all types of concerns received and action taken. Members also discussed the need to ensure that staff have an awareness of the policy.

Action: Details of any concerns submitted to the Department to be included in future reports and action taken in response.

Action: Staff to be reminded of the policy annually.

13 ASSET MANAGEMENT BOARD UPDATE

13.1 John advised Members that following approval of the NICS Office Estate Review in 2022, a target was set for 40% reduction in the office estate by December 2028. John noted the challenges for the Department and the issues included in the paper in relation to Leases, Government Land and Property Register, as well as the Climate Action Plan / Outline Sustainability Strategy. He noted that Beverley is the DoJ Sustainability Champion and has recently recorded a short video for the Intranet. John also provided an update on the Castle Buildings Refurbishment Project and there was a discussion on ongoing challenges with available accommodation.

Decision – The Board noted the update.

14 PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS UPDATE

14.1 John provided an update on the work undertaken by the Departments P3O, including project assurance and reporting. He noted DoF's proposals to change thresholds for Gateways reviews and SRO Appointment letters and the impact of these changes to the Department.

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Decision – The Board noted the update.

15 DARC UPDATE – 12 OCTOBER 2023

15.1 Colin provided an update on issues discussed at the DARC meeting held on 12 October 2023. He noted, in particular, that the Department's accounts were certified in July 2023 and The Report To Those Charged with Governance showed all recommendations had been accepted. Internal Audit also reported that their work plan was on schedule.

16 SUMMARY REPORT – DECISIONS MADE UNDER THE NI (EXECUTIVE FORMATION ETC) ACT 2022

16.1 Decisions taken during September and October 2023 under the NI (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2022 were provided to members for information.

12. AOB

12.1 No other business was raised.

13. KEY MESSAGES

13.1 The Board agreed that the key messages should focus on the following:

- Presentation on management of the prison population
- An update on the 2023/24 budget position
- Update on the progress against the DoJ Business Plan and a risk management update.
- Mid-year update on complaints received by the Department and concerns raised under the Raising a Concern policy.
- Update on the work of the Asset Management Board and Departmental Programmes and Projects

Date of the next meeting: 31 January 2024.

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