

DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING
- Minutes -
Wednesday 25 January 2017
Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast

Present: Nick Perry (Permanent Secretary)
Clarke Black (Independent Board Member)
Lianne Patterson (Director, Justice Delivery)
David Lavery (Director, Access to Justice)
Anthony Harbinson (Director, Safer Communities)
Ronnie Armour (Chief Executive, NI Courts and Tribunals Service)

Apologies: Phil Wragg (Acting Director, Reducing Offending)

In Attendance: Maria Watson (Secretary)

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

ACTION

1.1 The Chair welcomed Board members to the January meeting. Apologies were noted from Phil Wragg. The Chair congratulated Ronnie Armour on his appointment as Director of Reducing Offending with effect from 1 February 2017.

1.2 No conflicts of interest were declared.

1.3 The Board agreed the November minutes without amendment.

**Board Secretary to place
November minutes on
Departmental website.**

Critical Issues

2.1 The Chair updated members on political developments. The formal pre-election period will run from the dissolution of the Assembly on 26 January until polling day on 2 March and staff have been provided with guidance for the conduct of civil servants during this period. The Minister will continue in her post until 2 March to deal with urgent

business, after which there will not be a Minister until a new Executive is formed. The Chair noted that this would have implications for departmental business and this would be discussed further as part of the business plan review.

- 2.2 Following a series of allegations Internal Audit is to carry out an investigation relating to the Prison Service Trust.
- 2.3 The Director of Access to Justice confirmed that the PAC report on the management of Legal Aid was published on 11 January. The report was critical of the slow pace of reform and the continuing high cost of legal aid. The Department is putting together a response to the report, which will address the issues raised but also highlight the progress that has been made.

DOJ OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Business Plan/Risk Register

- 3.1 The Board discussed paper BP(17)1 which presented a progress update on the Departmental Business Plan and Risk Register at 31 December 2016. The discussions highlighted that a number of targets would be impacted by the dissolution of the Assembly. It was agreed that Corporate Secretariat would commission an exercise to capture the implications on business delivery.

Resourcing

- 3.2 The Director of Justice Delivery provided an overview of the current financial situation, including the impact of political developments on the budget. Arrangements are being made to brief ALBs. A workshop has been planned by HOCS to consider next steps and this will be followed by an internal Strategic Resources Committee meeting on 7 February.

GOVERNANCE

Sick Absence

- 4.1 The Board noted paper BP(17)2 which outlined the headline sick absence position for December, as the detailed data was not yet available from NISRA.
- 4.2 The Chair highlighted that the February Board meeting would have a

strong HR focus, with presentations by NICSHR (on project progress) and by Internal Audit (on their audit of absence management in DOJ). A more detailed discussion on sick absence would take place at this meeting.

Performance Management

- 4.3 The Board considered paper BP(17)3 which provided an update on the performance management compliance rates across the Department. The Chair noted concern that the rates were less favourable in certain business areas and asked Directors to follow this up urgently with their management teams.
- 4.4 Clarke Black drew attention to the statistics relating to staff who had not included the corporate objective in their PPA for 2016/17 and the Chair asked that this should also be addressed by Directors. A further compliance update was requested for the February meeting.

COMMUNICATION

Staff Engagement Forum

- 5.1 The Chair invited the Director of Justice Delivery (as Chair of the Staff Engagement Forum) to update board members on their recent meeting.
- 5.2 The Forum held their first formal business meeting on 30 November. Work is underway to formulate actions from the results of the Staff Attitude Survey; members are consulting with staff from their business areas and the outcome of this will be developed into a formal work plan.
- 5.3 The Director of Justice Delivery had undertaken to bring some points to the Board for consideration:
- (i) request for a staff magazine - *Board endorsed the development of a pilot magazine/e-zine;*
 - (ii) need to ensure contact details on DIAL are kept updated - *Board members agreed to disseminate this within their business areas and guidance would be sought from ISD;*
 - (iii) request to hold Board Q&A sessions; *Board endorsed this and asked Corporate Secretariat to draw up a model as part of the visible leadership programme.*

(iv) update on equal pay; *Board noted continuing staff concerns about this issue, policy responsibility for which does not rest with the DOJ, and will consider how best to respond..*

5.4 Some forum representatives are experiencing difficulties in getting time allocated to undertake their staff engagement responsibilities. The Director of Justice Delivery asked Board colleagues to ensure that line managers were supporting forum members and that this work was reflected in their PPAs.

Board Brief

5.5 The Board agreed the draft Board Brief with small amendments. The Chair asked that an update for staff on political developments should be included in the January brief.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Date of Next Meeting

6.1 The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 22 February at 11.00 in Castle Buildings.