



## DEPARTMENTAL BOARD MEETING

- Minutes -

Wednesday 23 March 2016

Castle Buildings

**Present:** Nick Perry (Permanent Secretary)  
Rotha Johnston (Independent Board Member)  
Clarke Black (Independent Board Member)  
Lian Patterson (Director, Justice Delivery)  
David Lavery (Director, Access to Justice)  
Sue McAllister (Director General, NIPS / Director, Reducing Offending)  
Anthony Harbinson (Director, Safer Communities)

**In Attendance:** Maria Watson (Secretary)

### OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

### ACTION

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the Board to the March meeting. No apologies were noted.
- 1.2 No conflicts of interest were declared.
- 1.3 The Board agreed the February minutes with one small amendment.
- 1.4 The Chair passed on the sincere condolences of the Board to the family and colleagues of Adrian Ismay.

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

### **NIPS – Managing Sick Absence**

- 2.1 Phil Wragg, the Director of Operations in NIPS, attended the Board to give a presentation on key issues with managing sick absence across the NI Prison Service.

- 2.2 During the presentation he outlined the unique operating environment within prison establishments and the challenges this poses for managing attendance. Additionally he highlighted that nearly 80% of prison operation staff have taken no sick absence in the past year.
- 2.3 The presentation provided comparisons on how sick absence management differs between NIPS and NOMS and outlined how NIPS propose to tackle the significant cultural problem of absence within the NI establishments. He concluded with some quick wins which he felt could impact favourably on absence management moving forward.
- 2.4 Following a brief discussion, the Chair thanked Phil Wragg for his informative presentation and the work he was taking forward within NIPS operations.

### **Critical Issues**

- 2.5 The Director of Access to Justice confirmed that a bid had been submitted to the Executive to establish a Legacy Inquest Unit.

## **DOJ OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

### **Business Plan / PfG / Risk Register**

- 3.1 The Board noted the Business Plan/PfG/Risk Register. A formal review has been commissioned for the end of quarter 4 and this will be tabled at the April meeting.

### **Resourcing Issues**

- 3.2 The Director of Justice Delivery outlined plans for taking forward "Budget 2016". It is intended that the process will be less paper-based and more interactive; SRC sessions will be held with key spending areas and a programme of work will be developed following this. FSD are aiming to complete this work before summer recess.
- 3.3 The Board noted that FSD anticipate a small underspend at the 2015/16 year end.

## DARC Update

3.4 Rotha Johnston briefed the Board on the March DARC meeting.

- The Committee agreed that training for all DOJ audit committee members and chairs should be offered twice yearly; Derek Anderson has agreed to take this forward.
- NIAO presented an overview of the audit plan for the NI Judicial Pensions Scheme which was agreed by the Committee.
- Joanne McDermott presented a paper on Conflict of Interest, following the issue of revised guidance by NIAO in 2015. The paper requires slight revision and will then be issued for consultation across DOJ business areas and ALBs.
- Ray Murray presented an Information Assurance Update paper which addressed a range of areas including governance structures, incident reporting and defence against cyber-attacks. It was notable that “human error” remains one of the main causes of incidences and the Committee sought assurance that training was mandatory for all staff to mitigate this.
- Suzanne Walsh presented the NIAO audit plan for 2015-16 and provided assurances that adequate resources were in place to take this forward.
- Richard Logan presented an update report on the year end accounts which highlighted that, as a shared service, FSD would be preparing the Annual Report and Accounts for all DOJ Agencies and Core Department. While the volume of work will put time pressure on FSD teams, it is expected that all accounts will be laid in the Assembly before summer recess.
- Louise McClean presented an update on the RTTCWG for 2014-15 and ongoing recommendations from previous years. Louise also presented a financial governance update which included information on suspected fraud reporting in LSANI. The Chair asked that LSANI give a presentation to the Committee on measures they have in place to counter fraud, later in the year.
- Derek Anderson presented a progress report against the 2015/16 DOJ Internal Audit plan, which encompasses a total of 79 separate pieces of work, and assured the Committee all work would be completed by year end. Derek also presented a draft plan on the proposed audit coverage across DOJ for 2016-17. An agreed plan will be presented to the June DARC

meeting.

- The Committee received an update paper on PPM which outlined that 25 programmes and projects were currently ongoing within the Department whilst 9 were on hold as they currently have no capital funding.

## **STRATEGY**

### **Fresh Start**

- 4.1 The Director of Safer Communities presented paper BP(16) 12 which updated the Board of progress with DOJ commitments under the Fresh Start Agreement.
- 4.2 He advised that the cross-departmental group had met and agreed terms of reference, as well as funding arrangements for some immediate areas including a Fresh Start Branch, the Three Person Panel from April-June, capital purchases for FSNI and a public awareness campaign.
- 4.3 Indications at this stage suggest that the Three Person Panel may report earlier than expected, to fit in with PfG, and their recommendations will be subject to a consultation exercise.

### **Diversity**

- 4.4 The Board noted paper BP(16)13 which outlined Diversity developments across DOJ and the wider NICS. The paper advised on the corporate approach now being taken to Diversity, driven by a Diversity Champions Network chaired by Peter May as NICS Champion.
- 4.5 The Director of Safer Communities, as DOJ Diversity Champion, assured the Board that the Department would maintain its focus on Diversity and will take forward the DOJ commitments in the NICS work programme.

## **GOVERNANCE**

### **People**

#### **Sick Absence**

- 5.1 The Board discussed paper BP(16)8 which outlined the headline sick absence position for February. They expressed disappointment at the continuing negative position and noted that this could be attributed to a number of factors including the VES scheme, approaching end of year and also the winter month period. The Board recognised that it is an unacceptable position and needs to be treated.
- 5.2 The Director of Reducing Offending advised that the Head of Civil Service would be visiting Maghaberry on 7 April and it would be useful for him to hear Phil Wragg's presentation to understand the unique challenges faced by the Prison Service.
- 5.3 The paper also updated the Board on developments in HR Shared Services and changes which will come in to place on 1 April. It is hoped that the establishment of a dedicated sick absence team will lead to greater uniformity in how sick absence is managed across the Department.
- 5.4 Rotha Johnston noted her support for the development but sought assurance that the human contact needed, especially in specialist parts of the business, would not be lost.

#### **Recruitment of State Pathologist**

- 5.5 The Board noted the paper on the recruitment of the State Pathologist and thanked the business areas for their efforts with this challenging piece of work.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Board Brief**

- 6.1 The Board reviewed and agreed the draft Brief with minor changes.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 7.1 The Chair briefed members on arrangements for a Board Away Day on Monday 4 April.
- 7.2 The Director of Justice Delivery reminded colleagues that the deadline

for NICS award nominations was 25 March. The Chair asked Directors to encourage further nominations from their business areas.

- 7.3 Rotha Johnston noted the success of the Valuing our People Awards on 10 March and passed on her thanks to the team involved in managing the event.

**Date of Next Meeting**

- 7.4 The next meeting will take place on 25 April in Castle Buildings, Belfast at 2pm.