

MINUTES

Board Meeting

Tuesday 15 June 2021 at 9.30am

Attendees: Paul Andrews (Chair)
Tom Burgess
Allen McCartney
Kerry McGill
Joanne McGaffin
Carolyn McDermott
Eamon O Connor (EAJD)
Marcella Philips (NICS HR)

Secretariat: Maria Dowds
Catherine O'Reilly

LSA/21/38 Apologies & Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

- 38.01 The meeting was conducted on site with Carolyn McDermott and Eamon O'Connor attending via WebEx. The Chair welcomed Kerry McGill to her first meeting as Director of Corporate Services and Joanne McGaffin who was attending in the place of the Director of Operations. Apologies were received on behalf of Mandy McKay and Louise Blair.
- 38.02 There were no conflicts of interest to declare.
- 38.03 The minutes from the previous meeting on 18 May 2021 were approved with minor amendments to 33.4. The action points were discussed with the recommendations endorsed.
- 38.04 The Chair noted the actions points regarding long-term sickness could be closed. NICS HR will produce a paper for the Chair regarding this report.
- 38.05 NICS HR actions points are still being collated and will be shared with Board members by the end of the month.

**LSA/21/39 Shared Services Reporting – NICS HR & Financial Services
Division**

- 39.01 The HR Report was noted by the Board.
- 39.02 The Board noted that the NICS Keeping in Touch app has been removed; the new method of contact with staff was via the Information Hub.
- 39.03 NICS HR provided an update on the Executive Officer 1 and 2 recruitment exercises which had passed the closing dates. It was noted that the assessment centres had not yet resumed because of Covid for SO and DP levels. An update was given on the progress to recruit and fill vacancies in the Agency at the grades of AO, EO, DP Legal and G7.
- 39.04 A short discussion took place on home working and it was noted that within the Agency there was a significant number of staff effectively working under a blended approach. It was noted that there had been practical issues encountered by the Agency, when filling vacancies including offers of promotion declined. NICS HR confirmed that such a refusal would result in the individual not being offered another post. Board suggested it would be important to track instances of refusal to move to certain posts to establish if there were particular difficulties in filling posts in customer-facing bodies.
- 39.05 NICS HR updated the Board in relation to action point LSA/A/159. It was noted that at present, the LSANI had 24 vacancies with 4 having been carried forward from September 2020. It was agreed that NICS HR would work with the Agency to provide a paper for the Board containing statistics of each outstanding job vacancy. The Board noted that 5 of the vacancies were in the process of being filled. NICS HR will meet with the Agency's Directors to discuss the plan to fill the vacancies.

LSA/A/16 NICS HR to provide a table of the number of vacancies and how they are to be filled.

Marcella Phillips left the meeting at 10.10 am.

- 39.06 The FSD Report was noted by the Board. The Board thanked FSD for the enhancements to the report and noted that this would be a good addition to the paper for the new NEMs.
- 39.07 There was a discussion on the spend in the first quarter and re-profiling of the spend for 2021/22.
- 39.08 FSD highlighted that the Departmental bid for justice recovery funding had been approved and the Agency now had an additional £6m to for the fund. Further bids had been made as part of the June Monitoring Round. The Board welcomed the additional funding but noted the value of the claims pending assessment.
- 39.09 There was a discussion on an overspend against staffing costs. This would be reviewed and adjustments made as part of the June Monitoring Round.
- 39.10 The Board noted the Account NI KPIs. While it was recognised the small number of payments meant that the Agency's figures were susceptible to distortion by a few cases, it was agreed that a notice would issue to staff reminding them of the procedures.

LSA/A/17 Note to issue to staff on Account NI processes.

Carolyn McDermott left the meeting at 10.30 am.

LSA/21/40 Agency Report

- 40.01 The Chair provided a verbal update on the LASG meeting.
- 40.02 The Board noted the content of the EAJD Cover Paper. Two projects were highlighted, Family Fees and Statutory Registration Scheme. The Board also noted that a consultation paper on Family Fees had now issued.

Eamon O'Connor left the meeting at 10.45am

- 40.03 The Board noted the contents of the Operations Report which Joanne spoke to and reviewed the Dashboard and KPI Reports.
- 40.04 The Board discussed the Appeal and Review panels and the number of Pre Action Protocol Letters (PAPL's) that LSA had received in relation to CLASP decisions.
- 40.05 The Board noted the work in hand to address over and underpayments identified by SAU.
- 40.06 The Board welcomed the progress in developing the Practitioner Error and Fraud pilot and the planned workshop with practitioners.
- 40.07 The Chair presented a projection of the future value of bills and unassessed bills against current budget and intake of bills, including potential impact on processing times.
- 40.08 The Corporate Services Report was noted. There was a discussion on the potential move from Waterfront Plaza.
- 40.09 There was a discussion on the IT support arrangements and the new support contract which was to be tendered. This included internal reviews on IT developments as they were considered low risk by DoF.
- 40.10 The Chair informed the Board that the work is continuing in Debt Recovery and a detailed report on the progress of this work would be brought to the next Board Meeting.

LSA/A/18 Debt paper to be tabled at next Board meeting.

- 40.11 The Board noted the FOI/DPA/Complaints and AQW tables. The Chair provided an update on the position of a FOI that was with the ICO.
- 40.12 The Board noted the Fraud and Error Official Error Report and the supplementary paper. There was a detailed discussion on the report and this would be further discussed at the Audit and Risk Committee on 18 June.

40.13 The Board noted that the Fraud and Error Action Plan had been updated to include May 2021.

LSA/21/41 Updates and Questions on Reports

41.01 No further issues arising.

LSA/21/42 Corporate Governance

42.01 There was a discussion on the revised Business Plan. The Chair explained the Business plan when finalised would go to the Minister as part of the Framework Document. Subject to a final proof read the Business Plan was approved.

LSA/A/19 Business plan to issue to Minister for approval.

42.02 The Corporate Risk Register was discussed. The Board concluded that the accommodation move should feature as a separate risk.

42.03 The Board noted the paper on the Stakeholder Engagement risk.

42.04 The Chair provided an update on the appointment of two New NEMs. It was agreed that the outgoing NEMs would facilitate a briefing with the incoming NEMs. The Board also noted that the LSA had drawn up a first day brief for the new NEM's, this was to provide background information on LSA.

LSA/A/20 NEM handover meeting to be arranged.

LSA/21/43 Any Other Business (AOB)

43.01 The Non-Executive Board Members noted the ongoing work with the Agency and commended staff and management on their performance in view of the challenges of working over the past year.

43.02 Paul Andrews thanked the current NEMs for their commitment, support and guidance during their time as NEMs for Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.

Next Meeting: TBA with new NEMs