

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 10am on 19th September 2022

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Margaret McCabe, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Fiona Quinn, Ms. Yvonne Cooke*, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

The Chairman welcomed the two new members, and informed the Board that the two outstanding appointments are still being processed by DPER.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports for the Board

Operational Report

The CEO thanked the Board for giving her the opportunity to take on this role on an Interim basis; she acknowledged that accountability for service delivery rests with her, and she will aim to prioritise this during her time in the role.

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report (and the supporting papers), which were circulated in advance of the meeting.

The CEO discussed the recruitment delivery targets, and informed the Board that 98% of roles had been filled for clients in 2022 to date.

In relation to recruitment timescales, she informed the Board that 70% of campaigns had been delivered within agreed timescales for 2022 (80% for Q2 to date), noting that this KPI is now moving in a positive direction following the implementation of the various actions initially discussed at the meeting in April. She highlighted that the Local Authority sector is now at 95% for 2022 (100% for Q2); P&T is at 76% (achieving 87% in Q2) and Medical Consultants is at 71%. She noted that SER remains lower at 52% (57% for Q2) and that while State Boards is at 58% for 2022, it is up to 88% in Q2 to date, which is another positive sign.

The CEO informed the Board that the Super 8 now attempts to capture reasons for delays (within and outside PAS control), noting that this is a work in progress which Ciaran would discuss later; she noted that the Recruitment Management Board Members will also discuss progress on delivery of the Action Plan later in the meeting.

The area of most concern continues to be general grade assignments, at 37% of delivery timescales achieved in 2022 (31% for Q2), mainly due to the difficulties outlined at the previous meeting around attrition rates, lack of workforce planning and increased demand. In terms of the dip in performance from Q1 to Q2, the CEO informed the Board there was a

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significantly higher volume of assignments made in Q2 over Q1. The CEO informed the Board that there is also more analysis on this area in the Super 8 in relation to the types of requests and the impact of this on timescales, which Ciaran would discuss later.

The CEO noted that there has been a significant increase in activity in 2022 (over 2021): 44% increase in campaigns advertised; 28% increase in assessments delivered 35% increase in interviews conducted; and 71% increase in assignments. It was agreed that these figures would also be mapped against 2019 and reported to the Board for the next meeting.

The CEO updated the Board on the Future of Work and return to Chapter House, with staff returning in June, and a phased transition to hybrid working. She updated the Board on the team-time sessions and the anchor day system in place; she also provided an update on staff engagement, through both the hybrid working survey and the Future of Work group. It was noted that staff will be required to work from the office two days per week from 3rd October and that the Hybrid Working Policy and the office desk booking platform will also be launched in October. The CEO discussed the Future of Work focused Town Hall meeting held on 2nd September, with staff provided with the latest updates regarding the Return to Chapter House and the transition to hybrid working. It was noted that piloting face-to-face interviews has commenced.

The Board discussed the arrangements in place for hybrid working in other organisations and it was noted that many other organisations are taking a similar approach to PAS. It was noted that the business will dictate the final model and that hybrid working is working well in terms of cross-functional and multi-disciplinary working. The Board welcomed the approach to staff engagement and the supports offered in terms of the return to the office and hybrid working.

The CEO outlined the results of the Transparency International Ireland's National Integrity Index, with the PAS overall assessment and rating (80%) included with the Board papers.

The CEO also discussed the significant implications of the Irish Language Act for PAS, including 20% of all yearly advertising to be in the Irish language, at least 5% of yearly advertising spend to be in Irish language media and 20% of staff recruited by 2030 to be proficient in Irish. It was noted that PAS is participating on the Advisory Committee in relation to recruitment and are engaging with the Department and the Commissioner Teanga.

The Board noted, that as a result of supply chain issues, the Second Floor is now due to reopen to staff in October; the installation of audio-visual equipment is also impacted by global supply chain issues and work is underway to bring some rooms online at the end of September/early October, and to complete the process by the end of Quarter 4.

The CEO updated the Board on the ESRI Project and noted that the ESRI have analysed data relating to 4,500 campaigns from 2019 - 2021, across the civil and public sector as part of the 'dashboard project' to provide insights into the quality of our own Equality Monitoring systems and processes, and to provide guidance and a framework (dashboard) to support the regular reporting of our equality monitoring data. It was noted that PAS is currently working with ESRI to finalise their findings and recommendations, with a final report due in October. The Board agreed that having a baseline is critically important and that it would be vital to have this in place as soon as possible. It was noted that this project will provide such a baseline and that an update will be provided at the next Board meeting.

The CEO provided an update on the Public Sector Recruiter Network, with the next session taking place next week. It was noted that the purpose of the Network is to facilitate greater

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collaboration in recruitment, with a strong focus on the sharing of best practice, identifying common challenges/opportunities and working together to attract the best people to our organisations; with 60 members, across 46 organisations currently. It was noted that the theme of the upcoming is 'Best Practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion', and that the session will feature a number of inputs, including a broad overview of the equality and diversity landscape in the context of recruitment and the workforce, with inputs from guest speakers and case-studies on how to create an ED&I work culture using a Universal Design approach.

Risk Management

The CEO noted that the ongoing issues in relation to Service Delivery Timescales were discussed as the Key Risk Area for previous meeting and the Management Board members with responsibility for Recruitment Selection will report later on the implementation of the Service Delivery Action Plan.

She also noted that an update on the risks highlighted by the Audit Committee in relation to Project Nova is included later on the agenda.

The Board noted that the Corporate Risk Register was included with the Board papers, with all updates in red.

The CEO outlined that some recruitment campaigns currently underway are very high profile roles which by their nature carry additional public scrutiny and increase the risk of reputational damage in the event of any issues occurring during these processes. The CEO informed that Board that PAS has been asked to take on other high profile roles also and are just waiting on DPER approval for aspects of these campaigns. It was noted that these roles are managed very carefully and a detailed recruitment plan is agreed with the client in advance.

The CEO also informed the Board that the paper on responding to peaks in recruitment demand is included with the Board papers.

The Board discussed the length of time it is taking to advertise the CEO for PAS and discussed the backlog of SER campaigns, including the roles of other parties in this initial stage. It was noted that additional resources have been allocated to SER and that PAS is only responsible for some of the delays in the process, and that there are significant delays at the final stage of the process, with difficulties in arranging the final interview date due to board member availability. It was noted that PAS had contributed to the TLAC review process with the CEO and Chair meeting the review group recently to discuss the process and potential areas for improvement.

It was noted that the Business Continuity Group have a Communications Plan, and it was agreed to review this in light of the recent high profile issues in other organisations.

The Board noted the level of formal reviews and noted that a number of these related to the new promotions work taken on by PAS for the AGS, which was not unexpected for a new process. The AGS nominee on the Board noted that the process is working well and is robust and commended the work of PAS staff on these campaigns.

Financial Position

The CEO discussed the Financial Report for end August which was included with the Board papers. As there are still vacancies to be filled, payroll remains favourable, but this favourable variance will reduce as the year progresses and staff numbers increase, and any

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agreement to backdate public sector pay increases to February 2022 would lead to significant additional costs in this sub-head. It was noted that this unexpected cost, when taken along with increases in electricity costs and potential inflation costs on the Chapter House project, may necessitate a supplementary estimate for the year.

The CEO outlined that expenditure on testing is higher than budgeted to date, and will be overspent at year end, due to significant increase in the costs of tests, the requirement for remote proctoring and the higher attrition rates. It was noted that expenditure on interview boards remains high, and the allocation is likely to remain under pressure for the remainder of the year. The CEO informed the Board that ChapterHouse costs are still to be finalised but this is being managed by OPW, and that work on the Audio Visual project has been delayed due to supply issues with some of the equipment. It was also noted that there have been delays to expenditure on Project Nova to date and expenditure will be lower this year as the system will not be procured until 2023.

Super 8

Ciaran Oman joined the meeting to discuss the extended functionality now included in the Super 8, with additional information on recruitment timelines and the factors causing delays. While recognising the factors influencing the challenges in getting interview board members, it was agreed that the availability of PAS board members should be included as a factor within PAS control. The Board welcomed the work to increase the diversity of board members. The delays in the State Boards process were discussed and specific factors were discussed, including the particular requirements of NewEra boards, and it was noted that there are often significant delays once PAS has submitted the names to the relevant Minister and that this is a cause for concern for candidates.

The Board discussed the additional information in relation to general grade assignments and welcomed the ongoing review of this to ensure that the classification of request type is as accurate as possible.

The Board supported the move to piloting part-time roles as a way of increasing the candidate pool and mitigating the risk of falling application numbers, and noted that it is a challenge to engage clients on this matter.

Recruitment Service Delivery Action Plan

Michelle Noone, Sandra Cairns and John Keegan joined the meeting to present the update on the Action Plan; it was noted that all key actions had either been implemented or were underway. The Board discussed the sourcing of board members, noting that availability of board members was a common issue across recruitment units. The suggestion of the Board to approach the Institute of Directors in this regard was noted and it was agreed that this would be actioned. The Board also discussed the resource re-alignment and the plans to devolve some aspects of the clearance process to some client organisations (and the MOUs being put in place to ensure that consistent standards are maintained). The delays in the pipeline were discussed and it was noted that some clients had agreed to provide additional resources to PAS to assist with this.

Update on the Key Risk Area – Digital Transformation (Project Nova)

The Board noted the paper provided in advance which addressed the issues raised by the Audit Committee. Rosemarie O'Mahony and Sandra Cairns gave a presentation to the Board in relation to the highest risk and issues around Nova, and how these are being mitigated and managed. The Board was informed that the Pre-Qualification stage is now closed and five suppliers have engaged with us, and the OGP are assessing the validity of

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the responses. It was noted that two of the five had come through the RFI process. The Board was satisfied with the paper and the presentation on the key risks and issues and following a discussion on the concerns of the Audit Committee, agreed that they were assured that the risks and issues are being managed. It was noted that risks during the transition stage will be high, but that there are procedures and plans in place to mitigate these risks. The Board was re-assured by the team's confidence that PAS will find a system and that there is no reason to expect STAR to stop working in the meantime. The Board was assured by the measures put in place to increase the security around STAR. It was agreed that the project board would make contact with colleagues in D/Housing who has implemented a similar type of system. The Board were satisfied with the project management structures and governance arrangements in place for this key project.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting and the Report on Remote Operations which had been included in the Board papers; the Board had no questions on either document.

Branding Project – Brand Strategy Concept and Research

The Board noted the pre-reading material that had been provided with the Board papers. Aine Gallagher and Niall Leavy (from PAS) and Dave Griffin and Susan Kelly (from Core) attending the meeting for this topic. Aine and Susan gave a presentation to the Board on the proposal from the Management Board to focus on building the publicjobs brand. The Board discussed the purpose of the brand and the links to the PAS strategy, vision and mission. The Board agreed with the Management Board recommendation and suggested this approach be discussed with DPER before being put into action. It was noted that a procurement exercise (the cost of which would be monitored carefully) would be required to redevelop the brand and that it was planned to roll it out in Q4 2023. The Board had some suggestions in relation to the proposed taglines and it was agreed that they would be considered further as part of the project.

Future of Work Update

Roisin Walsh gave a presentation to the Board on this topic including the journey to date and the plans for the future. It was agreed that hybrid working will always be subject to business needs and that there has to be ongoing flexibility from all sides. It was noted that the Board would be provided with some analysis from exit interviews. The Board welcomed the opportunities for staff to collaborate, the anchor day system and the development of team charters. The Board agreed that it was critical to provide support to managers in relation to managing in a hybrid environment. The Board also noted the plans for on-site recruitment.

Board Member Unit

Karen Lopez presented to the Board on a number of areas relating to the work of the Board Member Unit and the work undertaken to widen the pool of board members. The Board welcomed the establishment of this unit and noted how critical this work is considering the impact that shortages of board members are having on recruitment timescales.

AOB

The Board noted the results of the Board Review which had been circulated with the Board papers. It was agreed to consider these further and discuss this in detail at the next meeting in order to develop an action plan to address any issues raised.

Next meeting

The meeting will be held on 3rd November at 10am.