

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 9.30am on 22nd September 2023

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Margaret McCabe, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Fiona Quinn, Ms. Anne Marie Hoey, Mr. Colin Menton*, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Mary Connaughton, Ms. Yvonne Cooke.

**Attended virtually.*

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 Board noted the Operational Activity Report (and the supporting papers), which were circulated in advance of the meeting. The CEO informed the Board that the papers had been reviewed to ensure that only key information is included and reporting on State Boards will also be reviewed before the next meeting.

The CEO provided an update on project Nova, noting that the formal evaluation process is underway. She informed the Board that the timelines have been reviewed and re-baselined, informed by information gathered from the tender response documents and progress to date on the evaluation process. She noted that the evaluation, including a vendor demonstration, will be completed by Q4, with the standstill period to be completed in Q1 2024, with implementation also starting in Q1 2024. The Board noted that it would be important not to underestimate the length of time required to agree the contract, noting that this has been an issue in other public service contracts, but it would be critical to meet 2024 deadlines.

The CEO informed the Board that timelines are being achieved for campaign delivery year to date (at 81%, and at 92% in Q3 to date). She noted that TLAC now at 75% for year to date, which is a significant improvement from earlier in the year; the Board welcomed this improvement, which has been acknowledged in the system. It was noted that SER campaigns are at 16% which is due in part to the level of demand in the Local Authority sector and the availability of selection board members. It was agreed that the KPI in this area should be reviewed and benchmarked externally.

She informed the Board that general grade assignments are up to 28%, noting that this is still very low; although it is improving, the substantial backlog is impacting on the length of time it will take to achieve the 80% target. She noted that the backlog is decreasing significantly month on month. It was noted that there is ongoing engagement with D/PENDR and the CSMB on this area, and the wider attraction issue. Demands in this area were discussed and it was noted that the demands for administrative staff remain high despite the move to more online services and increased automation; it was agreed that the nature of

work and the skills required will change but demand remains high for general service staff at present.

The Board noted the concerns around quality caused by the issues around attraction and attrition. It was agreed that it is critical to look at the civil service offering to prospective candidates and to try and widen the candidate pool. The CEO outlined the particular issues in filling HEO vacancies due to the limited internal candidate pool. It was agreed that D/PENDR would consider how the pool might be broadened and the Board welcomed the CSMB plans to also consider this area as the Board considered this would be a key entry grade for external talent.

The CEO updated the Board on the last meeting of the CSMB Sub-group and noted that PAS will examine TCO and CO timelines further and assess options for assigning candidates subject to clearance for some departments (subject to a risk assessment). It was noted D/PENDR will develop principles for allowing other licence holders to conduct limited general service recruitment; develop a route to permanency for TCO to CO and the potential of repeat contracts to address seasonal TCO demand. It was noted that D/PENDR is also to establish programmes for apprentices, returners, internships and part-time workers and will work with PAS on these in order to wider the applicant pool.

The CEO updated the Board on the outstanding actions from the last meeting. It has been agreed that PAS should only be measuring and reporting on the aspects of the TLAC process within the control of PAS and that an SLA is needed with TLAC in relation their responsibilities in the process. It was noted that the KPI has been changed to report on TLAC campaigns from advertising to preliminary interview, and that an SLA is being drafted (but is subject to agreement on how to proceed with TLAC and TLAC Specialist competitions in terms of the role of PAS). It was noted that this SLA will need to take account of the recent TLAC Report and the ongoing discussion with D/PENDR on the implementation of this report. The Board agreed that it would be useful to have a presentation on the implications for PAS arising from the TLAC Report.

PAS had also agreed to consider the option of allowing candidates to self-select for particular roles using an online system in order to better match the roles on offer with the candidates applying. It was noted that there is currently not enough information available from clients on roles to allow this to take place but that it will form part of Nova and engagement will take place with clients as part of the review of merit to allow this to be implemented.

It was also agreed that PAS should put SLAs in place with clients that would outline their responsibilities and the behaviours expected; it was noted that a draft SLA has been developed and it will be rolled out shortly.

Risk Management

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register which had been provided with the Board papers.

Financial Position

The Board noted that the Financial Report for the end of August was included with the Board papers. The CEO noted that overall payroll will be unfavourable, and it is intended to vire from capital to cover these additional costs, as has been agreed with D/PENDR. It was noted that other A2 costs are also unfavourable due to the level of recruitment demand and high operational costs. It was noted that expenditure on Project Nova is behind schedule, and the extended procurement process means that the full allocation for the year will not be

required; it is expected that any funding surplus to requirement by the project will be vired to the current expenditure budget to help cover the expenditure pressures in payroll and recruitment costs. It was agreed that the narrative around AinA would be amended to reflect the costs reimbursed from clients.

The CEO informed the Board that PAS is meeting D/PENDR on Monday in relation to our estimates submission, with the main drivers of expenditure including general service recruitment, expanded scope of services, staffing, candidate attraction and engagement and operational costs.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the two audit reports which had been provided with the Board papers in addition to the Minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting. The Board nominee on the Audit Committee agreed that the Committee were pleased with the reports and had received a good update from the DPO. She also noted that the Committee were very satisfied with the performance of Mazars.

Board Nominee for the Audit Committee

The Committee agreed to consider this at a later date once the two new members are in place. It was noted that the previous Board nominee would remain on the Audit Committee as an external member in order to ensure continuity.

PAS Code of Ethics and Code of Business Conduct

It was agreed to review these further to ensure that they clearly reflect how the required culture and values should be displayed in PAS. It was noted that integrity is central to the work of PAS and the role of selection board members in ensuring integrity and protecting PAS values is key.

Capacity Review Terms of Reference

The Board discussed the draft terms of reference. The Board agreed that this project would be critical to the success of Nova and would be very supportive of it. It was agreed that the Terms of Reference should include some additional information on the integration with Nova and would be recirculated to the Board once they have been amended. The Executive provided assurance that the original procurement process allows for Grant Thornton to carry out this Capacity Review.

Next meeting and AOB

The Chair noted that the next meeting will take place online should it be required. He noted that as the Board have had a meeting and Strategy Session today there may be no requirement for a meeting in October, as the new Board Members are unlikely to be in place at that stage.

The Chairman thanked Eddie Molloy and Anne-Marie Taylor for their service to the Board over their period on the Board.

Minutes of the Board of the Public Appointments Service Strategy Session held in Chapter House, at 11.30am on 22nd September 2023

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

Management Board: Niall Leavy, Aoife Lyons, Eimear O'Connor, Sandra Cairns, Sinead Coleman, Michelle Noone, Fiona Morgan.

Apologies: Ms. Mary Connaughton, Ms. Yvonne Cooke, Mr. Colin Menton, Rosemarie O'Mahony, Aileen Tuliani.

External Speaker

Daniel Gerson, OECD, attended the session virtually and delivered a presentation on attracting the next generation to careers in the public service. The Board had a useful discussion following the presentation.

Approach to Merit

The Board noted the paper circulated in advance. Aoife Lyons and Catherine Dobbins outlined the reasons for a new approach and how it might be implemented. The Board was updated on the consultation to date and noted that there would be consultation with the CPSA and D/PENDR if the Board agreed to this approach. It was agreed that the suggested approach would be of benefit to clients and candidates and should help with attraction. It was agreed that PAS should engage with the CPSA and D/PENDR and roll out the approach on a gradual basis, and that it could then evolve over time based on learning from the pilots.

AI in Recruitment

Aoife Lyons and Carl Boyle gave a presentation on AI in recruitment and outlined the work underway in PAS in this area. The Board acknowledged that PAS has this under consideration in terms of both the risks and what it can offer and agreed that this was a reasonable approach.

Strategy Implementation Framework

The Board acknowledged the draft Framework which had been issued in advance. Stephen Buckley gave a presentation on the Framework and the approach being taken by PAS to strategy implementation. The Board acknowledged that clients have a key role in supporting PAS and that there is a need for a central approach to retention. The Board welcomed the engagement with the CSO and D/PENDR on gaining access to other data which would allow PAS to understand whether appointees are being retained and how they are progressing in their careers following their appointment.

It was agreed that the Board would sign off on this Framework once all of the KPIs have been finalised.