

## **Minutes of eighty-ninth meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held remotely by Zoom, at 2.00pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020**

**Present (Board):** Mr. Tom Moran, Mr. Dave Cagney, Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Mr. John O'Callaghan, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Anne O'Connor, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Mary Hurley.

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The Board noted that Ms. Mary Hurley has replaced Mr. Barry Quinlan as the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage nominee, and welcomed her to the Board. The Board also welcomed the reappointment of Mr. Eddie Molloy and Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor to the Board for a further term.

The Board acknowledged the significant amount of work being done by Anne O'Connor and her team in the HSE in responding to the pandemic.

### **Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising**

The minutes were agreed.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **CEO's Report for the Board and Operational Report**

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report which was circulated in advance of the meeting, and the key risks outlined therein.

The CEO updated the Board on a number of key areas and current trends in activity. This included the increasingly high level of applications across all campaigns, and the potential issues this is causing in areas not used to large volumes of candidates, such as senior executive and specialist recruitment. She explained that measures are being put in place to respond to this trend, including sifting applications and pre-shortlisting meetings with the Board with guidance from the client organisation in terms of person required. The CEO also informed the Board that the volume of requests is now returning to pre-Covid levels, as it appears that clients can better manage remote onboarding and performance, and there is also clear Brexit related recruitment requirements. The CEO stated that Margaret McCabe would provide an update on operations later under the key risk theme of the PAS response to Covid.

The CEO also informed the Board that staff engagement continues to be high, with PAS adopting an agile approach with staff and services deployed across the organisation as required. The CEO explained that there has been an extensive investment in training and wellbeing and regular surveys of staff engagement and needs. It was noted that Roisin Walsh would also provide an update on areas related to the People and Culture function later under the key risk theme of the PAS response to Covid.

The CEO informed the Board that all strategic projects and business goals are being delivered despite the Covid-19 situation with some changes; with a paper on this circulated in advance. She also outlined the significant investment in time and Management

Board engagement with the KPI project, which Ciaran Oman is scheduled to discuss with the Board later in the meeting.

The CEO also outlined developments in the area of external engagement, including membership of the National Recruitment Federation, and the development opportunities for staff in relation to this. The CEO also discussed the request from DEASP in relation to PAS involvement with Intreo in supporting their labour activation initiative. It was agreed that the Board would receive an update on this at the next meeting once the role of PAS has been clarified. The Board also noted that the CEO has been invited to be a member of the Expert Review Group on Recruit Education, Entry, Pathways and Learning and Development for An Garda Síochána. This group has been established to provide strategic advice and make recommendations to An Garda Síochána in areas that are fundamental to the successful delivery of learning and development in the Organisation; the first meeting of the group will take place on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

The CEO informed the Board that the OPW are in discussions with the landlord to extend the lease on Chapter House before contracts are signed in relation to the building works. The timescales for this project are being managed by the OPW, and although the project has experienced some Covid related delays, the OPW and PAS are satisfied with the agreed project timescales for this complicated project, involving two separate contractors for different aspects of the project. Working from home will allow the project to be accelerated now that the contractors are in place. The Board noted that, on the advice of the OGP and the CSSO, PAS has terminated the contract with Mount Charles on the expiry date due to the current situation with remote working and interviewing.

The CEO outlined the current situation in relation to the new Strategy, including the plans for a launch in early October, with a series of staff events, followed by a client engagement. It was noted that a strategic roadmap of the programme of work and an implementation framework are in development to support the delivery of the strategy, and that a reporting framework has also been developed to monitor and track the progress of divisional business plans and the key strategic projects and to serve as an early warning system for any slippage or changing priorities.

The CEO updated the Board on developments in relation to ED&I, including plans to launch the ED&I Strategy with NUA 23. The Board noted that an internal Project Board has been established to drive implementation, with an external Chair of this Board being sourced. The CEO also discussed the establishment of a data working group to systemise and maximise the use of equality monitoring data.

The Board agreed that PAS is doing extremely well in terms of core activities in the current situation and are also progressing well in terms of strategic direction. The Board also agreed that the initiatives in place to enhance the capacity of the organisation are key to sustainability.

The Board discussed some of the system-wide challenges in the current situation including staff turnover, remote induction, and lack of face-to-face staff engagement, and the need to adapt to both Covid and Brexit related challenges. The Board noted the engagement by PAS with DPER and with the HR Managers Network to share good practices with clients. It was noted that absence levels in PAS continue to be very low, similar to a lot of organisations working remotely, and that it can be more of a challenge to get staff to take adequate leave in the current climate. The Board acknowledged the challenges involved in supporting the various sectors through Brexit and Covid and the additional supports PAS has provided to clients as part of its trusted adviser remit. The Board welcomed the focus on capability building. It was acknowledged that PAS only has the capacity to deliver within its

resourcing levels and agreed that it was important to ensure PAS staff are supported and protected in delivering on this significant work programme.

### Financial Position

The Board noted the Financial Report circulated in advance of the meeting. The CEO informed the Board that spending is over by approx. €100k on A1 and that PAS in discussions with DPER as to how to manage receipts in this area; the CEO also explained that significant savings are expected on A2.

The CEO stated that the PAS estimates submission was sent to DPER on 19<sup>th</sup> August and that the first bilateral meeting in relation to the submission will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> September; it was noted that PAS has requested an increase of €807k (€478k in A1 and €330k in A2) in current expenditure, with a capital allocation requirement of €3.8m for the building upgrade and Project Nova). The additional expenditure forecasted for A2 relates to ED&I research, additional funding for IT to progress the digital transformation strategy and additional funding for People and Culture to support staff through the current crisis and make additional progress in terms of professionalisation.

### **Presentation of the Annual Report of the Audit Committee and update from the Audit Committee**

The Chairperson of the Audit Committee, Ms. Clare McGrath, presented the 2019 Audit Committee Annual Report to the Board. The Report had been circulated in advance and the Board thanked Ms. McGrath for her work, and the work of the Committee. Ms. McGrath outlined progress in relation to the three audits delivered in 2019 and the ED&I audit which was carried into 2020 (and which was circulated to the Board in advance). The Board was assured that the executive are implementing the recommendations arising from the audits, and asked that the executive continue to have due regard to both implementation of recommendations, and requests for information from the Audit Committee. Ms. McGrath outlined the risk based approach being adopted to audit selection and stated that the risk reports received at each Audit Committee meeting are proving to be very useful and assist in ensuring that audits are being selected to investigate areas of greatest risk. The Audit Committee welcomed the current review of the Internal Audit Function being carried out by the IPA, including the review of the audits being conducted by the outsourced Internal Auditors. The Board noted that there have been issues, both qualitative and quantitative, with the reports being delivered by the Internal Auditors and that this is taking a lot of management in PAS to ensure delivery. Ms. McGrath stated that the Committee will review progress in terms of delivery by the Internal Auditors following receipt of the final two audits for 2020 in December. The Board agreed to also consider this issue at their December meeting.

### **Update on Business Plans and Strategic Projects**

The Board noted the report which had been circulated in advance. It was noted that three projects were at amber but these are actively being managed and the CEO is satisfied with the progress to date. The Board noted that PAS is filling the vacancy for an ED&I Lead and acknowledged the importance of this role and the need to fill it with the required expertise to deliver the ED&I Strategy.

## **Key Risk Theme – Ongoing Response to Covid-19 Situation, including Impact on Strategic Priorities and update on People and Culture Actions**

The Board noted the paper which had been circulated in advance in relation to the impact of Covid on PAS strategic priorities. Margaret McCabe and Roisin Walsh made presentations to the Board on PAS response to Covid in terms of operations and people and culture. The Board noted the amount of work being progressed and acknowledged the difficulties involved in keeping up this level of work in the coming months. The Board welcomed the initiatives now in place to share PAS expertise and knowledge with clients. They also acknowledged the level of work being put into supporting staff in terms of development and wellbeing. The Board acknowledged that there is a lot of concern and anxiety in workplaces generally at the moment and welcomed PAS plans to continue to support staff through this.

## **Key Performance Indicators – Introducing the ‘Super 8’**

The Board noted the paper circulated in advance on the development of the Super 8. Ciaran Oman also gave a presentation to the Board on the potential output and performance dashboards and indicators. It was agreed that Ciaran would engage with Anne-Marie Taylor on a bilateral basis to get her input into the proposed approach. It was agreed the developments and engagement in relation to this project have been very positive. The Board noted the significant progress achieved and agreed to reflect on the level and format of information they would like to receive, including the regularity and form of reporting on KPIs (and the prospect of deep-dives into specific areas at meetings). The Board acknowledged the significant effort being invested into this project to achieve the level of progress to date, and agreed to discuss it further at the next meeting.

## **Board Evaluation**

The closing date for the Board Member questionnaire has been extended to 2<sup>nd</sup> October and all members were asked to complete the survey if possible.

## **Next meeting**

To be arranged for October/November.