

**MINUTES OF THE 415<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT  
10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 28<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016  
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

**Present:** Marie Mallon (Chair)  
Louise Crilly  
Deirdre Fitzpatrick  
Michelle McGinley  
Gary McMichael  
Alison Millar  
Albert Mills  
Jill Minne  
Daire Murphy  
Pauline Shepherd

**In Attendance:** Tom Evans Chief Executive, (CEO)  
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services, (DCS))  
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services, (DAS))  
Alison Wolfe (Minutes Secretary)

**Action**

<p><b>1. Apologies</b></p> <p>An apology was received from Penny Holloway.</p>	
<p><b>2. Conflicts of Interest</b></p> <p>There were no interests declared.</p>	
<p><b>3. Chair's Opening Remarks</b></p> <p>The Chair thanked members for their contributions at the Board business planning day in February. She indicated that this was an important time for the Agency as at the time of the May Board meeting the Agency will be under the direction of the new Department for the Economy.</p>	
<p><b>4. Minutes of 21 January and 25 February 2016 Meetings</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meetings held on 21 January and 25 February 2016 were agreed as true and accurate records of the meetings.</p>	<b>Secretary</b>
<p><b>5. Matters Arising from 21 January 2015 Minutes</b></p> <p><b><i>CIPFA Presentation on Corporate Governance</i></b></p> <p>The CEO referred to his recent meeting and follow up correspondence received from Steve Mungavin regarding CIPFA's Mark of Excellence governance standard. Board members expressed some concern about the cost and potential work involved in working through the standard. The Chair emphasised the importance of continuing to strengthen the Agency's governance arrangements to offer assurance to our new sponsor Department.</p>	

<p>It was agreed that the CEO should contact some of the organisations involved in the CIPFA pilot scheme and report back to the Board.</p>	<p><b>CEO</b></p>
<p><b>ICMS Presentation</b></p> <p>The CEO reported that the SMT had agreed that the Phase 2 specification for CMRS would cover the residual functions of Advisory Services only with the HR requirements being taken forward under a separate bespoke tender process. The DCS advised that the Phase 2 specification is being adjusted to reflect this approach and to include further enhancements that are required for Early Conciliation. The CEO confirmed that the CMRS Project Steering Committee is being reconstituted to oversee the Phase 2 implementation.</p>	<p><b>SMT</b></p>
<p><b>MSFM</b></p> <p>The Board noted the CEO's end year assurance statement. The CEO explained that he had included a reference to the limited assurance from the records management internal audit but did confirm that the overall assurance is satisfactory. The CEO also confirmed that he had discussed an appropriate form of words for inclusion in Governance Statement for the 2015-16 Annual Report and Accounts with Internal Audit.</p>	<p><b>CEO</b></p>
<p>The CEO reported that the Certification Officer is content with the revised MoU. The CEO also advised that the ERM in the Certification Office will be retiring at the end of May and would be replaced through the current recruitment exercise.</p>	<p><b>HR ERM</b></p>
<p><b>Matters Arising from 25 February 2015 Minutes</b></p> <p>Board members commented that they found the February Board workshop and the induction session very worthwhile but would appreciate more time for a more in depth discussion on some issues. In response the Chair indicated that the September Board meeting will be used to start the corporate planning process for 2017-2020; this would be timely given the upcoming changes to the operating environment and challenges faced by the Agency.</p> <p>The CEO confirmed that he has been invited to a workshop on 12 May that will inform sponsored bodies about the Executive's approach to the new Programme for Government, which will be more outcome-focused. The new approach will have implications for the Agency's annual and corporate business plans.</p>	<p><b>CEO</b></p>
<p><b>6. Board Member Training/Appraisals</b></p> <p>Board members were encouraged to avail of suitable training opportunities.</p> <p>The Chair will be attending a conference on 'Human Rights – a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Approach to Ombudsmen' on 26 May.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Board members for agreeing suitable dates for appraisal meetings which would provide an opportunity, particularly for new members, to discuss ideas.</p> <p>A summary of responses on the recent Board self-assessment exercise will be provided at the May Board meeting.</p>	<p><b>BMs/Sec</b></p> <p><b>Chair</b></p> <p><b>Chair/BMs</b></p> <p><b>BMs/DCS/Sec</b></p>
<p><b>7. Board Sub-Committee Updates</b></p> <p><b>7.1 Research Sub-Committee</b></p> <p>The Chair reminded members about the vacancy on the Research Sub-</p>	

Committee. The Chair of the Research Sub-Committee advised that he had discussions with the CEO and agreed that this sub-committee requires an external focus which would then generate a broader research agenda. In this regard the CEO has agreed to contact NISRA to discuss a suitable approach. A meeting of the Research Sub-Committee will be arranged for early June.

**CEO/Sec**

### **7.2 LRA Finance & Personnel (F&P) Sub-Committee**

The Chair of the F&P Sub-Committee tabled a paper setting out the key issues discussed at the 14 March 2016 meeting. Three substantive agenda items were covered, namely Finance, Human Resources and ICT. The Chair of the F&P Sub-Committee Chair commended Gerry O'Neill, Michael Riddell and Paul Herink for their informative presentations. It was agreed that the F&P Sub-Committee has a valuable role to play in providing advice to the Board.

It was agreed that the students involved in developing social media apps should make a presentation to a future Board meeting. The use of 'apps' would increase efficiency and communication channels.

The Chair of the F & P Sub-Committee also confirmed that accommodation would be a standing agenda item at future meetings, the next meeting to be arranged for June.

**Secretary**

### **7.3 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)**

The Chair of the ARAC tabled a report of issues covered at the 2 March 2016 meeting. The Committee will be revisiting the internal audit reports on Corporate Governance, Conciliation Services and Records Management along with the Risk Register at its next meeting. The Committee requested that minutes of meetings were issued as soon as possible to allow actions to be followed up.

**DCS/Sec**

The Chair thanked the Chair of the ARAC for her report which provided a high level of assurance to Board members.

## **8. Update on Roundtable/Other Stakeholder Meetings**

### **(a) Roundtable**

The Chair reported on a very positive meeting of the Roundtable held on 5 February when Alan Scott from DEL provided a presentation on the Employment Bill. The presentation was well received and it was suggested that the Department should use the Roundtable as the first point of contact when developing any policy proposals.

The Chair also confirmed that Penny Holloway had delivered an excellent presentation on Early Conciliation which was well received by Roundtable members.

The Chair reported that the Roundtable would be holding an away day on 27 May.

**Chair/CEO**

### **(b) Other stakeholder meetings**

The Chair and CEO reported on a very positive meeting with Brendan Barber and Anne Sharp on 1 March to discuss Acas experiences of delivering Early Conciliation. Anne expressed an interest in learning more about our Case Management Record System and has agreed to provide the keynote address at the Agency's public meeting in October.

It was noted that the Agency will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in October 2016 and that this would provide an excellent PR opportunity. Board members were

<p>asked to give consideration to ways to mark the occasion. Discussions are on-going regarding a staff conference later in the year which it may be possible to combine with the anniversary event.</p> <p>The Chair and CEO reported on their meeting with Eugene Rooney &amp; Paul Brush regarding the restructuring of government departments and the new Department for Economy.</p> <p>The Chair and CEO also reported on a very positive meeting with Jackie Kerr, who will have lead responsibility for sponsorship of the Agency within DfE.</p> <p>The Chair also reported on her input to the Gateway Review in relation to the restructuring of government departments and her attendance at the most recent meeting of the Chairs' Forum.</p>	<b>BMs/SMT/Sec</b>
<p><b>9. Finance Issues</b></p> <p><b>9.1 End Year Budget Performance for 2015/16 (Paper 22/15 – updated)</b></p> <p>The DCS introduced the end year budget performance paper which indicated underspend of less than 2%, the actual final underspend will be clarified when all accruals have been established. The DCS indicated a satisfactory performance throughout the year.</p> <p>The DCS confirmed that the format of the Annual Report and Accounts has changed from the 2014-15 arrangements and that John Davin of Baker Tilley Mooney Moore will provide an overview of the accounts at the May Board meeting and will also be available to respond to issues raised by the Board.</p> <p>Board members suggested that urgent consideration should be given to the staff training budget for 2016/17.</p> <p>The Chair congratulated the DCS and his team for their work on the budget throughout the year.</p> <p><b>9.2 DEL Letter – 2016-17 Financial Position – Labour Relations Agency</b></p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the letter.</p>	<b>DCS</b>  <b>SMT</b>
<p><b>10. HR Issues – Human Resource – Quarterly Board Update Paper (Paper 3/16)</b></p> <p>The DCS introduced the HR update paper and draft HR People Strategy which had been adjusted following comments provided by the Finance &amp; Personnel Sub-Committee on 14 March. The CEO confirmed that the HR People Strategy will be shared with staff and TUS for consultation.</p> <p>The CEO also confirmed his intention to develop a leadership and management programme for all levels of management as a mechanism for increasing capability and contributing to succession planning. The Chair was encouraged by the emphasis on team effectiveness and development.</p> <p>Board members felt that while the Strategy provided an excellent framework, it had a very generic focus; and that the themes needed to be more specifically aligned to the strategic objectives of the Agency. The strategic context should include the values and behaviours of staff; evaluation was important – consultation,</p>	<b>SMT</b>

<p>implementation, involvement, engagement.</p> <p>Board members were updated on the recent recruitment exercises.</p>	<p><b>SMT/HR ERM</b></p>
<p><b>11. Business Plan Performance Report for 2015/16 (Paper 24/15 – updated)</b></p> <p>The CEO in introducing the end year Business Plan performance report indicated that despite not having a full complement of staff the Agency had met a substantial number of targets in the Business Plan. The CEO confirmed that a number of targets could not be achieved because of the following external factors; late introduction of the Employment Bill, a policy change by DEL, dependency on the commitment/actions of third party organisations.</p> <p>The CEO highlighted that all frontline service operational targets had been met by introducing a range of measures to mitigate the impact of staff shortages.</p> <p>The Board, in noting the paper, acknowledged and congratulated staff for their commitment in meeting all key delivery targets.</p>	
<p><b>12. Draft 2016/17 Business Plan (tabled)</b></p> <p>The CEO presented the draft 2016/17 Business Plan paying particular emphasis to new priorities/themes identified by the Board at their February workshop.</p> <p>The following amendments were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ SO1 – amend the Strategic Objective to ‘when individuals and organisations...’. CEO to add target referring to individuals.</li> <li>✚ SO5 – amend wording in para 3 to read ‘Develop with the Employment Relations Roundtable Forum the strategic drivers that will strengthen Northern Ireland’s employment relations system by 31 December 2016.’</li> <li>✚ SO13 – para 1 – amend to read ‘31 March 2017’.</li> </ul> <p>A revised Business Plan including updated performance indicators and financial information will be considered at the May Board meeting with a final version going to DfE for approval. The CEO agreed to share the final draft with DfE in advance of the May Board meeting.</p>	<p><b>SMT</b></p>
<p><b>13. Employment Bill - Early Conciliation Business Case (Paper 2/16)</b></p> <p>Board members noted the content of the Early Conciliation Business Case and the initial queries raised by DEL.</p> <p>The CEO reported that the Employment Bill has now received Royal Assent. An implementation date of May 2017 for Early Conciliation is anticipated.</p>	<p><b>CEO/DCA</b></p>
<p><b>14. Any Other Business</b></p> <p>Chair to follow up invitation to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy to meet the Agency Board.</p>	<p><b>Chair</b></p>
<p><b>15. Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>The next meeting of the <b>Agency Board</b> will take place on <b>Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016 at 10.00 am in the Agency’s offices, 2-16 Gordon Street, Belfast.</b></p>	<p><b>Secretariat</b></p>