

**MINUTES OF THE 406th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY
BOARD HELD AT 10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 21 MAY 2015
IN THE AGENCY'S OFFICES, GORDON STREET, BELFAST**

Present: Marie Mallon (Chair)
Deirdre Fitzpatrick
Sally McKee
Gary McMichael
Alison Millar
Albert Mills
Jill Minne
Daire Murphy
Gordon Parkes

In Attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Penny Holloway (Director, Conciliation & Arbitration)
David McGrath (Director, Advisory Services)
Gerry O'Neill (Director, Corporate Services)
Alison Wolfe (Minutes Secretary)
Siobhan Steele (Capita) in attendance for item 2

Action

<p>1. Apologies</p> <p>An apology was received from Pauline Shepherd.</p>	
<p>2. Board Briefing on the Accounts</p> <p>Siobhan Steele took the Board through the key elements of the draft 2014/15 accounts. The critical importance of the governance statement was noted. It was agreed that the Governance Statement should contain updated verification that management information supplied to the Board was adequate. The Board asked if the costs associated with child-care vouchers could be included under the section dealing with permanently employed staff.</p> <p>It was noted that a revised draft of the final accounts will be considered by the Audit Committee on 18 June with a recommendation that the Board approve the accounts at the Board meeting on 25 June.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Siobhan Steele for her presentation and the preparation of the draft accounts.</p>	<p align="center">Audit Cttee/ Board</p>
<p>3. Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 26 March 2015</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	<p align="center">Secretary</p>

4. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes not listed on this Agenda

Item 3 - 4.1 - NI Water

It was noted that the recent dispute at NI Water had now been settled. The Chair, on behalf of the Board, thanked the DCA and her staff for their involvement.

Item 3 - 6 6.2 Meeting held on 4 December 2014

The CEO reported on a very positive DEL/LRA quarterly accountability meeting highlighting the following issues:

- DEL officials will give further consideration to the accountability issues in relation to the Agency and the NI Certification Officer;
- DEL officials to arrange a meeting between the CEO, DAS and representatives from the Department's Analytical Services Department;
- Agreed that the Agency should begin to develop the detailed specification and associated business case for Phase 2 of the ICMS project using the approved business case for the recently completed phase 1 as a template;
- DEL officials re-iterated the need for a robust business case setting out costs for development work, implementation and additional operational costs in relation to Early Conciliation;
- DEL officials were supportive of the Agency Business Plan having a focus on SMEs and a specific target for developing links with the further education sector;
- It was agreed that a target should be included relating to the DEL review of the Statutory Arbitration Scheme;
- DEL officials confirmed that it would be appropriate for the Board to review the Corporate Plan given the developing policy context and the recent appointments of the Chair, Board Members and Chief Executive and new Board members in the near future.

CEO/DAS

CEO/Dirs

CEO/DAS

CEO/DCA

4.1 SME Support Strategy (Paper 10/15)

The DAS presented a paper highlighting the range of services delivered to SMEs and current uptake. The Board agreed that there is a need to continue to promote the Agency's services through our key stakeholders. Invest NI is a key partner and it was agreed that the Agency should seek a meeting with the Chief Executive of INI. The Board endorsed the following recommendations:

- continue to deliver the existing suite of services;
- strengthen the operational arrangements with the Agency's key delivery partners;
- be proactive in raising the awareness of the Agency's Advisory Services;
- develop and promote case summaries; and
- participate in the University of Ulster's survey of SMEs.

CEO

<p>4.2 2014 Staff Survey (Paper 11/15) The CEO presented a paper setting out the key findings from the 2014 staff survey. The Board endorsed all of the actions set out in the paper and agreed that management should now share the results of the staff survey with all staff.</p> <p>The Board asked to receive a paper providing an update on progress with the actions arising from the 2013/14 stress risk survey. The Board also asked that consideration be given to refocus this work under a health and well-being theme.</p> <p>4.3 The Investors in People (IiP) Process (Paper 12/15) The DCS presented a paper setting out the Agency’s preparations for the upcoming assessment process. The Board noted that the SMT will be meeting with the IiP assessor on 26 May to discuss the re-assessment which is provisionally scheduled to take place in June 2015, subject to the availability of the assessor. Staff will be briefed in advance of being involved in the assessment process.</p> <p>The CEO acknowledged the work of staff and the cross-directorate Engagement Sub-Group in taking IiP forward within the Agency.</p>	<p>CEO/Dirs</p> <p>CEO/DCS</p> <p>CEO/Dirs</p>
<p>5. Chair’s Business</p> <p>5.1 Conflicts of Interest</p> <p>Alison Millar declared an interest in Item 7.1 and indicated that she would leave the meeting while discussion took place.</p> <p>It was noted that Register of Interest forms had been issued to Board members for completion and return.</p>	<p>Board/Sec</p>
<p>5.2 Board Member Training</p> <p>Board members were reminded that relevant training literature would be issued as and when received by the Agency.</p> <p>The Chair outlined the performance assessment process emphasising the need to complete the relevant documentation in advance of the individual appraisal meetings.</p>	<p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary</p>
<p>5.3 Board Self-Assessment for 2014/15 (Paper 13/15)</p> <p>The Chair led a discussion on the outcomes of the 2014/15 self-assessment process. It was agreed that self-assessment is a very worthwhile exercise and that the results were generally positive, reflecting the view that there is now greater clarity about the strategic direction of the Agency. The Chair confirmed that the Board self-assessment process will be referenced in the Agency’s 2015/16 Annual Report and Accounts.</p>	<p>CEO/DCS</p>

<p>The Chair indicated that she would like to hold a further Board away day later in the current financial year to review the Corporate Plan to take account of the strategic priorities identified at the February 2015 planning event and emerging policy, financial and structural developments.</p>	<p>Chair/CEO</p>
<p>5.4 Update on Stakeholder meetings</p> <p>(a) <u>The Roundtable</u> (b) <u>Other Stakeholder Meetings</u></p> <p>The Chair and the CEO reported on their meetings with the Chamber of Commerce, CBI, Equality Commission, FSB, IoD, the UK Council of Employment Judges and individual members of the Employment Relations Roundtable to explore opportunities for further collaboration and to explore the future role of the Roundtable.</p> <p>Feedback from all of the meetings was very positive about the services delivered by the Agency.</p> <p>The meeting with the Equality Commission focussed on the importance of creating more opportunities for joint working, with research highlighted as a potential development area. The EC Chief Commissioner offered to broker links with the local universities. It was also agreed that planning for the next joint meeting should now commence.</p> <p>The Chair and the CEO briefed the Board on the discussions relating to the Roundtable, reporting that all representatives saw value in taking time out to establish terms of reference and a programme of work which would have a positive impact on employment relations and be consistent with the objectives set out in the Executive’s Programme for Government. Arrangements are currently being made for a meeting of the Roundtable in June.</p> <p>The above views would be reflected in the review of the Agency’s current stakeholder strategy.</p> <p>Board members agreed the meetings with stakeholders had been very positive; that the Agency should continue to support the Roundtable but that it needed to have a clear purpose and credible programme of work.</p> <p>In relation to the joint meeting with the Equality Commission it was agreed that the joint meeting needed to have a meaningful agenda and that research could be one of the substantive items.</p>	<p>CEO</p> <p>Chair/CEO</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>Chair/CEO</p>
<p>5.5 Board Priorities (Paper 9/15) (updated)</p> <p>The CEO reported that many of the operational priorities were already being taken forward but that the section dealing with strategic direction should be further explored at the next Board away day to be held later in the current financial year. It was agreed that the CEO should continue to update the paper for noting at future Board meetings.</p>	<p>CEO</p>

<p>6. Chief Executive's Business</p> <p>6.1 2015-16 Budget Forecast (Paper 14/15)</p> <p>The DCS presented a paper setting out the Agency's forecasted total budget spend for 2015-16 under the main expenditure lines as well as the projected monthly profile of expenditure. The DCS confirmed that the profile reflects a potential 1% pay uplift and increased IS/IT recurring costs. The CEO assured the Board that the SMT will complete a detailed monthly monitoring exercise to ensure that the Agency does not exceed its baseline.</p> <p>The DCS advised the Board that there has been an approach from the Strategic Investment Board on behalf of the Executive to explore options for reducing the Agency's accommodation costs including sharing of accommodation with other ALBs. The CEO explained that this was part of a wider rationalisation of the Government estate. The DCS indicated that details of the SIB initiative were contained in Note 1 to the May Bi-monthly Report.</p>	<p>CEO/Dirs</p> <p>CEO/DCS</p>
<p>6.2 2015-16 Business Plan (Paper 15/15)</p> <p>The CEO, in presenting the draft Business Plan, explained the process of engagement across the organisation in developing the plan and how early drafts had been adjusted to reflect the input from staff at team meetings.</p> <p>The CEO also advised that the draft plan had also been shared with TUS; that the local branch in noting its content had specifically highlighted objective 10, which commits to continue to further developing its staff; but that any reduction in the Agency's budget would require a review of the existing objectives.</p> <p>The Board in acknowledging that the targets were both realistic and challenging recognised that many of the Agency's services are demand-led.</p> <p>The Board confirmed that they were content with the targets set out in the draft plan and agreed that a revised version, to take account of a number of minor drafting changes, could now go the DEL for approval. The Board will then sign off the final version at the June Board meeting.</p>	<p>CEO</p>
<p>6.3 Industrial Relations Research (Paper 16/15)</p> <p>The DAS introduced a paper charting the research either conducted or commissioned by the Agency since it was established. The Board discussed reconvening the Research Committee and partnering with other organisations. The Agency may also be able to facilitate research through the Roundtable or DEL. The new case management system could provide the Agency with greater reporting capability.</p> <p>It was agreed that research should be a strategic priority and following a proposal from the Chair it was agreed to convene a meeting of the Research</p>	<p>CEO/DAS</p>

<p>Committee to determine what research should be undertaken and to identify delivery partners.</p> <p>Board members agreed to give some thought to membership of the Research Committee as currently there is only one Board member involved.</p>	<p>CEO/DAS</p> <p>Board</p>
<p>6.4 Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee (Paper 17/15)</p> <p>The CEO presented a paper setting out the background to the Finance and Personnel Committee and setting out a range of reform options. The Board agreed that the Finance and Personnel Committee should continue to meet but that it should review its terms of reference and bring back a proposal to the Board. The Board, advised by the Committee, could then review its effectiveness after one year of operation under the new terms of reference.</p>	
<p>6.5 Stakeholder Strategy</p> <p>It was agreed to defer this item to the June 2015 Board meeting.</p>	<p>CEO</p>
<p>6.6 Bi-Monthly Performance Report – 1 April 2014-31 March 2015 (Paper 18/15)</p> <p>The CEO provided an end-year report on progress against each of the strategic targets.</p> <p>It was noted that the Intranet had been launched and provided an important means of communication/information sharing for all staff.</p> <p>The Chair, on behalf of the Board, congratulated staff for their achievements throughout the year.</p>	<p>CEO/Dirs</p>
<p>6.7 Employment Law Update</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of the table.</p>	<p>DAS/MMcA</p>
<p>7. Corporate Correspondence Received Relevant to Board</p> <p>7.1 NIPSA Correspondence</p> <p>Daire Murphy declared an interest at this point and left the meeting. The Board noted the notification from NIPSA of the commencement of industrial action in relation to the dispute over Public Sector job cuts from 6 May 2015.</p> <p>The CEO advised the Board of an issue that arose immediately after receipt of the NIPSA notification and confirmed that he had communicated the Agency’s position to the local TUS Branch.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that following this meeting she had received correspondence from the local TUS Branch expressing disappointment about the outcome of this process. The Chair acknowledged that this is a difficult</p>	<p>CEO</p>

<p>situation for both management and local TUS but was very supportive of the Agency keeping the lines of communication open; and that she was content that relationships between management and TUS remained positive.</p>	
<p>8. Any Other Business</p> <p>Board members were informed of the death of the mother of a member of staff. It was agreed to write to the staff member offering the Board's condolences.</p> <p>The Chair made a presentation to Patricia McQuillan to mark 35 years of service with the Agency. Patricia responded by saying how much she enjoyed working in the Agency and the various roles she had held over the years.</p>	<p>Ch/Sec</p>
<p>9. Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of the Agency Board will take place on Thursday, 25 June 2015 at 10.00 am in Room 5, Gordon Street.</p>	<p>Secretariat</p>