

**MINUTES OF THE 459th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT
10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2020
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

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

In Attendance: Tom Evans Chief Executive (CEO)
Don Leeson Director, Corporate Services (DCS)
Mark McAllister Director, Employment Relations Services (DERS)
Alison Wolfe Minute Secretary
Sarah Livingstone Boardroom Apprentice

Members of the Board met ‘in-camera’ prior to the formal commencement of the meeting.

	<i>Action</i>
<p>1. Apologies</p> <p>Apologies: None.</p>	
<p>2. Conflicts of Interest</p> <p>No conflicts of interest declared.</p>	
<p>3. Chair’s Opening Remarks</p> <p>The Chair congratulated Sarah Livingstone on her promotion with her current employer.</p> <p>The Chair reported that, at their in-camera session, the Board received updates on the temporary and permanent Director of Corporate Services recruitment processes. The proposed schedule of meeting dates for Board and committees for 2021-22 was also discussed; all dates were agreed except October 2021, which coincides with other events – an alternative date will be scheduled.</p> <p>The Chair reminded Board members that a governance meeting to clear essential business will be followed by a Board workshop. The workshop comprises a presentation by Chris Warhurst and Sally Wright from the University of Warwick on research to inform the development of an employment relations model for NI and a discussion on next steps. Senior Management Team members have been invited to the workshop.</p>	Secretary

<p>The Chair reported that she and the CEO met Geraldine McGahey and Evelyn Collins of the Equality Commission. Discussion topics included how the respective organisations had responded to Covid-19, strategic priorities and future joint working. It was agreed that a more structured approach to joint meetings and projects would be beneficial to both organisation; this will be actioned following the appointment of a new Agency Chair and Board members next year.</p> <p>The Chair and CEO also met Clare Chapman and Susan Clews, their respective counterparts at Acas. Acas had been impressed by the work of the Agency during the pandemic, the work of the NI Engagement Forum, and the concept of the Employment Relations Roundtable. It was agreed to develop a structured approach with WRC, Acas and LRA meeting regularly to discuss common issues.</p> <p>The Chair went on to outline the agenda for the meeting.</p>	
<p>4. Chief Executive's Update</p> <p>The CEO highlighted the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ DfE's high regard for the way the Agency conducts itself in both governance and service delivery; and, ✚ Staff pressures and morale issues among staff. <p>The Board noted the challenging environment in which staff are operating: the threat of Covid and the pressures on personal lives this brings, increased demand for services, and dealing with customers whose livelihoods have been severely impacted by the lockdown and consequential recession. A number of actions are being taken to support staff mental health and wellbeing, including a planned series of motivational talks. Feedback from staff has been very positive about the level of support received.</p> <p>The Board noted the content of the Chief Executive's update.</p>	
<p>5. Business Plan Performance Report (for the period ending 31 October 2020) (BP01-11/20)</p> <p>The DCS introduced the report highlighting that all bar one of the objectives are on target. User acceptance testing of enhancements to the Early Conciliation portal have fallen behind schedule, but are still expected to be delivered in 2020-21.</p> <p>The DERS reported resource pressures in conciliation services. Volumes are greater than anticipated in the Early Conciliation resourcing business case. Furthermore, a number of large public sector employers are seeking to settle their holiday pay liabilities. The next Senior Management Team meeting will consider a resourcing strategy for conciliation; a paper will then be brought to December 2020 Board meeting on the way forward.</p> <p>The Board noted the content of the report.</p>	<p>CEO/DCS/ DERS</p>

<p>6. Management Accounts for the period ended 31 October 2020 (BP02-11/20)</p> <p>The DCS presented the Management Accounts. Following a review, some capital expenditure has been reclassified to resources, meaning an apparent overspend in that budget. However, this is a profiling issue and masks an underspend on employment costs. It was noted that additional funding provided by DfE includes provision for overtime working, which has not yet commenced. The Board noted the risks to staff health and well-being associated with overtime if they work excessive hours. Careful monitoring of this will be needed by line managers.</p> <p>The Board noted the content of the report.</p>	
<p>7. Proposed Board & Sub-Committee Meeting Dates April 2021-March 2022 (Paper BP03-11/20)</p> <p>It was agreed to reschedule the October 2021 Board meeting (see item 1 above).</p>	
<p>8. 2021-25 Corporate Plan (Strategic Theme 3) (Paper BP04-11/20)</p> <p>The CEO introduced the paper indicating that the Board agreed that the structure of the existing Corporate Plan remained fit for purpose. This paper focuses on Strategic Theme 2 priorities for the new Corporate Plan, which it would be useful for the Board to consider prior to the presentation on the employment relations model. Priorities for Strategic Themes 1 and 3 will be presented to a forthcoming Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board noted that a key priority for the year ahead should be to clarify the longer term need for the Employment Relations Roundtable and the NI Engagement Forum on Covid-19. One outcome might be to evolve them into a single forum for employer and employee representatives to engage with Government and others on employment relations policy matters. However, for the time being, the Board noted that the Engagement Forum continues to fulfil an important role for DfE during the current Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The Board noted that the research by the University of Warwick, which was funded by DfE, will need careful consideration as to how it should be progressed in the context of the Minister's emerging employment rights strategy.</p> <p>The other key area of work under this Strategic Theme is evidencing the economic and social return of good employment relations at a macro level. This might be pursued jointly with Acas and WRC.</p> <p>Board members stressed the importance of positioning the new Corporate Plan and actions in the context of economic recovery.</p> <p>The Board noted that the intention is to develop a draft Corporate Plan for consultation with stakeholders in early 2021.</p>	<p>DCS/DERS</p>

<p>9. Any Other Business</p> <p>The Chair reported that the Finance and Personnel Committee met to review CEO performance for last year and part of this year; a minute of the meeting is being prepared.</p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>10. Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of the Agency Board will be on Thursday 17 December 2020 at 10.00 am by videoconference.</p>	<p>Secretary</p>