

**MINUTES OF THE 458<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD HELD AT  
10.00 am ON THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 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><b>1. Apologies</b></p> <p>Apologies: None.</p>	
<p><b>2. Conflicts of Interest</b></p> <p>No conflicts of interest declared.</p>	
<p><b>3. Chair's Opening Remarks</b></p> <p>The Chair reminded members of the joint meeting with the Equality Commission, which follows the Board meeting. Deirdre Fitzpatrick and Jill Minne are unable to attend.</p> <p>The Chair reported on discussions at the in-camera session regarding the DCS recruitment process, the CEO's changed working pattern, and a proposal regarding Employment Relations Managers' attendance at Board meetings.</p> <p>It was noted that DfE has published and circulated advance notification of the forthcoming Board vacancies.</p> <p>The next Board meeting will be a workshop with a presentation from the University of Warwick on research to inform the development of an employment relations model for NI. Members of the Senior Management Team will attend for the presentation. The workshop will be preceded by a short governance meeting to clear essential business.</p>	

<p><b>4. Minutes of previous meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ 27 August 2020 (BP01-10/20)</li> <li>✚ 24 September 2020 (BP02-10/20)</li> </ul> <p>The minutes of the meetings held on 27 August and 24 September 2020 were <u>agreed</u> as true and accurate records.</p>	
<p><b>5. Matters arising from the minutes of 27 August 2020 and 24 September 2020 (BP03-10/20)</b></p> <p>The DCS introduced the action points paper highlighting the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ A technology solution has been identified to collect customer satisfaction feedback regarding the Workplace Information Service. This is awaiting capital funding;</li> <li>✚ Corporate governance policies will be reviewed to ensure they are up-to-date in time for the induction of new Board members;</li> <li>✚ The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has agreed three-year Strategic Internal Audit Plan. The first audit of the plan commences on 2 November. It reviews the effectiveness of the Agency's response to Covid-19; the outcome will be report to the Committee in December 2020;</li> <li>✚ Plans to re-open Head Office in October 2020 have been scaled back because of an increase in Covid19 transmission rates. Strict controls are in place to allow small numbers of staff to come into the office for specific tasks that cannot be undertaken at home. The office will not now re-open until 2021;</li> <li>✚ Work continues to complete the current phase of enhancements to web portal; a proposed solution and costs are awaited for work to address an issue regarding representatives' use of the portal;</li> <li>✚ Jill Minne had kindly provided NICS contact details to explore their policies regarding reward and recognition; HR are revising the policy and proposals will be brought to the Finance and Personnel Committee in December 2020;</li> <li>✚ Proposals are being developed regarding a Diversity Champion for discussion by the Finance and Personnel Committee in December 2020.</li> </ul> <p>The Employment Relations Group's (ERG) suggestion regarding Agency involvement in supporting topical issues remains under discussion. Consideration to progressing this matter is being made in the context of Section 75 and a proposal to establish a Diversity Champion.</p> <p>The DERS reported that the Working from Home guide is now available on the Agency's website.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DCS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p>
<p><b>6. Chief Executive's Update</b></p> <p>The CEO highlighted the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ The Agency has achieved the Investors in People Gold standard. The Chair and Board conveyed their congratulations to staff. Board to consider how to celebrate the achievement. CEO to ask ERG members to consider how we recognise this collectively.</li> <li>✚ Noted that there are some morale issues among staff because of the nature and volume of work and the pandemic continuing into the winter</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p>

<p>months. The Senior Leadership Team has discussed and the matter will be raised at ERG. The HR Team is evaluating its work to identify if a change in approach is needed. The CEO suggested inviting a series of motivational speakers to address staff, possibly including DfE's Permanent Secretary to discuss the importance of the Agency's work. Board members will be invited to events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ EC Project Board meeting – focus now is on evaluation to review both qualitative and quantitative data. Paper to be prepared for the December 2020 Board;</li> <li>✚ The CEO and DCS emphasised work and financial pressures at the recent Oversight and Liaison meeting with DfE;</li> <li>✚ Correspondence from NISRA was circulated to Board members confirming that the Agency will become an official producer of statistics and will be included in the new Statistics Order that will come into effect in 2021. The Chair said this was a remarkable achievement;</li> <li>✚ The University of Warwick report is positive; CEO met with Departmental officials to discuss the report. Board to invite the Minister to a future meeting to discuss the work of the Agency, employment policy developments, and where the research links to an employment rights strategy. It was noted that promotion of the research should be set in context of economic recovery.</li> </ul> <p>The Board noted the content of the Chief Executive's update.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair</p>
<p><b>7. Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 30 September 2020 (BP04-10/20)</b></p> <p>The CEO reported that the Performance Report for the first six months of the year is very positive with good progress made on the majority of objectives.</p> <p>The DERS highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Calls to the WIS team have increased by over 30% compared to last year. Calls are mainly concerned with redundancy and other issues associated with Covid-19. A number of callers are emotionally distressed or irate, which impacts on staff;</li> <li>✚ The Line Manager's Certificate will run from January to March 2021 in a blended approach with live question and answer sessions;</li> <li>✚ Following Board approval, work to modernise the document review service is progressing;</li> <li>✚ Partnership work with the Equality Commission is progressing in a number of areas, including menopause, bullying and harassment, and promotion of the Joint Declaration;</li> <li>✚ Early Conciliation cases are higher than forecast. Problems for representatives in using the portal persist;</li> <li>✚ The Agency is involved in a number of high profile collective disputes;</li> <li>✚ The first virtual mediations and independent appeals are scheduled, although some parties are preferring to wait until in-person services can resume;</li> <li>✚ Terms of reference for the review of Independent Appeals will be presented at the December 2020 Board meeting.</li> </ul> <p>The DCS highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ The extensive work being done to support staff's health and well-being;</li> <li>✚ The contract extension for IS managed services has been signed;</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">DERS</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✚ The social media advertising campaign is producing extremely positive results – a report on the outcome of this will be made to the Finance and Personnel Committee in December 2020;</li><li>✚ The James House Design Team will be redesigning the Agency's planned layout to reduce the number of workstations to create more collaborative space to reflect staff's aspirations regarding agile working arrangements. Staff will be consulted about the new design through the James House ERG sub-group;</li><li>✚ The annual audit of the Agency's ISO7000 accreditation is scheduled for 22/23 December 2020;</li><li>✚ Disability awareness training is being arranged for staff and Board members.</li></ul> <p>The CEO highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✚ DfE has provided £10k to plan the employment relations conference in 2021; the University of Warwick research might provide a focus for this event;</li><li>✚ The NI Engagement Forum continues to meet on a monthly basis – DfE's Permanent Secretary and Invest NI's Chief Executive attended the last meeting. The Chair has also engaged with the Chair of the Economic Advisory Group to discuss areas of mutual interest;</li><li>✚ The research undertaken by Cardiff University into how employers manage workplace conflict is being prepared for publication.</li></ul> <p>The Board noted the content of the report. The Board also noted the substantial amount of work being undertaken by staff. The Chair asked for sincere thanks to be passed to staff.</p>	<p><b>DCS</b></p> <p><b>DCS</b></p> <p><b>DCS</b></p> <p><b>DCS</b></p>
<p><b>8. Revised Budget for 2020-21 (BP05-10/20)</b></p> <p>The DCS presented the revised budget which takes account of additional funding provided to the Agency following October Monitoring and a bid for additional funding to respond to increased demand for services as a result of Covid-19. The additional funding will allow temporary staffing arrangements to continue to the end of the financial year. The aim is to get the in-year funding incorporated into the Agency's budget baseline to allow these staffing arrangements to be made permanent.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that DfE is very supportive in obtaining extra funding for the Agency.</p> <p>The Board approved the revised budget.</p>	
<p><b>9. Mid-Year Assurance Statement (Paper BP06-10/20)</b></p> <p>The Board noted the Mid-Year Assurance statement.</p>	

<b>10. Any Other Business</b> None.	
<b>11. Date of Next Meeting</b> The next meeting of the <b>Agency Board, Thursday, 26 November 2020 at 10.00 am by videoconference.</b>	<b>Secretary</b>