

**MINUTES OF THE 463<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD  
HELD AT 10.00 am ON THURSDAY 25 MARCH 2021  
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

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

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Don Leeson	Chief Executive
	Paul Lowe	Interim Director of Corporate Services
	Mark McAllister	Director of Employment Relations Services
	Alison Wolfe	Minute Secretary
	Sarah Livingstone	Boardroom Apprentice

**Apologies:** None

Board members met 'in-camera' prior to the formal commencement of the meeting. The key points from this discussion are recorded at agenda item 1.

**Declarations of Interest:** no conflicts of interest were declared.

This was the last Board meeting for Marie Mallon, Gary McMichael, Alison Millar, and Albert Mills before their terms of office end on 30 April 2021. Minister for the Economy, Diane Dodds MLA, joined the meeting to thank them for their service to the Agency. The Minister also praised the work of the Agency, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gordon Milligan, who has been appointed as the Agency's new Chair with effect from 1 May 2021, joined the meeting to introduce himself to the Board.

## **1. Chair's Opening Remarks**

- 1.1 The Chair reported that she had used the in-camera session to update Board members on the Board appointments process.

- 1.2 The Chair reported that she is due to meet the Interim Head of the Civil Service, Jenny Pyper, on 8 April 2021 to discuss the importance of good employment relations and social dialogue.

## 2. Minutes of previous Board meetings

- 2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 28 January (paper BP01-03/21) and 25 February 2021 (paper BP02-03/21) were agreed as accurate records of the meetings, and for publication on the Agency's website.

**Action: Secretary**

## 3. Action Points from Previous Board meetings

- 3.1 The Chief Executive introduced the progress report on action points from previous Board meetings (paper BP03-03/21).
- 3.2 The Agency's response to the Programme for Government was submitted to The Executive Office on 22 March 2021.
- 3.3 Draft guidance on Covid-19 vaccination in the workplace and model policy has been issued to the NI Engagement Forum for comment. The policy has also been agreed with Trade Union Side for implementation in the Agency.

**Action: Directors**

## 4. Chief Executive's Report

- 4.1 The Chief Executive presented the report (paper BP04-03/21).
- 4.2 The Chief Executive reported that the Agency has achieved the Customer Service Excellence standard. The assessor's report is awaited and will be shared with Board members in due course.  

**Action: Director of Corporate Services**
- 4.3 The Chair congratulated staff on a very successful year for the Agency.
- 4.4 It was noted that the next Employment Relations Roundtable and Engagement Forum on Covid-19 meetings are scheduled for 15 and 21 April respectively.
- 4.5 The Board noted that a number of partnership arrangements are being put in place with members of the NI Engagement Forum. These are to provide advisory support as part of the Agency's contribution to the Economic Recovery Action Plan.

4.6 The Chief Executive reported that the Agency awaits confirmation of its budget allocation for 2021-22. The Agency has bid for additional funding as part of the Economic Recovery Action Plan. A draft budget will be presented to the Board once the Agency's funding for 2021-22 has been confirmed by DfE.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services**

4.7 The Board noted that the report on workplace dispute resolution, prepared by researchers from the University of Cardiff, and press release will be published on 28 March 2021. Media interest in this is expected.

4.8 The Chief Executive reported that the licence agreement for James House has been agreed. The licence agreement is for five years and will yield significant savings, which will be used to fund the filling of vacant staff posts.

## **5. Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 28 February 2021**

5.1 The Chief Executive introduced the Business Plan Performance Report (paper BP05-03/21), which was noted by the Board. The Chief Executive reported that all but six out of the Business Plan's 43 targets are expected to be achieved. The remaining targets will be completed in 2021-22; work on these has been delayed because of a number of factors, including the need to reprioritise resources to meet demand for conciliation services.

5.2 Board members noted that the narrative sections of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020-21, the Performance Report and Accountability Report, will be presented to the next Board meeting.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **6. Management Accounts for the period ended 28 February 2021**

6.1 The Chief Executive presented the Management Accounts (paper BP06-03/21).

6.2 The Board noted that the Agency is on course for a modest underspend in line with financial targets.

6.3 The Chief Executive reported that DfE has approved funding to cover the Agency's liability for dilapidations on Head Office, following relocation in 2022. This is subject to completion of a surveyor's report. A provision for this liability will be made in the Agency's accounts for 2020-21.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## 7. Committee Reports

### Finance and Personnel Committee

- 7.1 The Committee Chair reported on the key points from the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021 (paper BP07-03/21).
- 7.2 Board members noted the report and thanked the Committee Chair and Gary McMichael for their service on the Committee.
- 7.3 The Committee Chair thanked Committee members and staff for their support during his term of office.

### Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting

- 7.4 The Committee Chair reported on the key points from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on 8 March 2021 (paper BP08-03/21).
- 7.5 The Board noted that the audit of financial procedures had found some invoices where there had not been pre-authorisation of purchase orders. As a result, training for staff on the financial procedures is being arranged.  
**Action: Director of Corporate Services**
- 7.6 Despite this, Internal Audit has provided satisfactory assurance (the highest rating) on the Agency's financial procedures. The Committee Chair congratulated staff on this achievement.
- 7.7 The Board noted that a planned presentation to the Committee on information/cyber management had to be postponed until September 2021 because of pressure on the Committee's agenda.  
**Action: Director of Corporate Services**
- 7.8 The Board noted that, following discussion at the last Committee meeting, Committee members agreed to adopt a modified version of DfE's Risk Management Framework for use in the Agency. As a result, the Corporate Risk Register will identify inherent, current and future risk assessments.  
**Action: Director of Corporate Services**
- 7.9 The Committee Chair thanked Alison Millar and Gary McMichael for their service on the Committee.

## 8. Corporate Plan Consultation Document

- 8.1 The Chief Executive presented the Corporate Plan Consultation Document (paper BP09-03/21).

8.2 The Board noted that actions agreed at last month's planning workshop are reflected in the Corporate Plan.

8.3 The Board approved the Corporate Plan for public consultation. It was noted that the views of Employment Relations Roundtable and Engagement Forum members will be sought as part of the consultation.

**Action: Chief Executive**

8.4 The Chief Executive reported that a draft Business Plan for 2021-22, which implements the first year of the new Corporate Plan, will be presented to the next Board meeting. Thereafter, final versions of the Corporate and Business Plans will be presented to the June 2021 Board for approval.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **9. Board and Committee Member Induction Programme (Paper BP10-03/21)**

9.1 The Chief Executive presented the Board and Committee Member Induction Programme (Paper BP10-03/21). The programme was reviewed at the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting and has been updated in light of comments made by Committee members.

9.2 The importance of an early team building event for Board members was noted, either physically or virtually.

9.3 Board members agreed a proposal for continuing members to buddy new members. Pairings will be proposed by the Chair and Chief Executive.

**Action: Chair/Chief Executive**

9.4 The Board and Committee Member Induction Programme was approved for implementation.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **10. Corporate Governance Policies (Paper BP11-03/21)**

10.1 The Board noted that the suite of corporate governance policies (paper BP11-03/21) had been reviewed, and updated where appropriate, for inclusion in an induction pack for new Board members. The updated policies were reviewed at the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for submission for Board approval.

10.2 The Director Corporate Services highlighted an anomaly regarding the Code of Conduct for Board Members. The Agency has previously followed the model code as issued by the Department of Finance. However, provisions in the model regarding political activities differ from those set out in the House of Commons Disqualification Act (1975) and the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act (1975) as they relate to the Agency. The anomaly has been raised with DoF and a response is awaited. In the meantime, the updated Code of Conduct reflects the requirements of the 1975 Acts.

10.3 The Board approved the updated suite of corporate governance policies.

10.4 Feedback from DoF on the anomaly regarding the Code of Conduct for Board Members will be reported to the Board when received.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services**

## **11. Any Other Business**

11.1 The Chair individually thanked those members who were leaving the Board for their contribution and wished them well.

11.2 The Chair said she really appreciated her time as Chair of the Agency and the contribution made by Board members. The Chair also thanked members of the Senior Leadership Team and staff and wished all well for the future.

11.3 On behalf of the Board, Alison Millar thanked the Chair for her contribution to the Agency.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

12.1 The next meeting of the Agency Board will be on 13 May 2021 at 10.00am by videoconference.

**Action: Secretary**