

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM HELD AT 10.00am
ON 15 FEBRUARY 2022 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Present:

Don Leeson	Chief Executive (Chair)
Paul Lowe	Director of Corporate Services
Mark McAllister	Director of Employment Relations Services
Fionn Davey	NIPSA Branch 180 Chair
Pamela Robinson	Executive Assistant
Alison Wolfe	Minute Secretary

Apologies: Elaine Clarke, Mary O'Brien

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Minutes from the Senior Leadership Team meeting held on 18 January 2022

1.1 The minutes of the meeting (paper SLT 01-02/22) held on 18 January 2022 were agreed for publication on the Agency's website.

Action: Secretary

2. Actions arising from the previous minutes

2.1 The Chief Executive and Director of Employment Relations Services will be meeting NIPSA officials on 8 March 2022 to discuss the future of the Independent Appeals Service (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive

2.2 Roundtable members were advised at their meeting on 9 February 2022 that recruitment to the support role has been placed on hold pending confirmation of the Agency's budget for 2022-23 (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.3 The Chief Executive met his counterparts in Acas and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) on 9 February 2022 to review the International Agencies virtual conference, among other matters (paragraph 2.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A report on this is being prepared by WRC and will be shared when available.

Action: Chief Executive

2.4 The Communications Manager is finalising an Internal Communications Framework, which will be circulated to SMT for discussion (paragraph 2.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.5 The Agency awaits the outcome of its submission for the Diversity Mark Bronze Award. It is due to be reviewed by the panel on 1 March 2022. If successful, it is anticipated that this will result in social media coverage.

Action: Chief Executive

2.6 Dignity at Work training is being organised for all staff, along with investigator training for line managers (paragraph 2.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). This will link into equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work and dovetail with the revised Dignity at Work policy. Feedback from Dignity at Work Advisers has been taken on board and training will be tailored to the needs of the Agency.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.7 The Chief Executive and his counterpart at the Equality Commission met on 20 January 2022 to agree the agenda for the joint Board meeting on 2 March 2022. The agenda will include a briefing by the Equality Commission on the work of the Dedicated Mechanism Unit (DMU) regarding Article 2 of the NI Protocol and an update on Early Conciliation by the Agency.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.8 In-house collective conciliation training for ERMs has been organised for the week commencing 28 February 2022 (paragraph 2.10 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The list of confirmed attendees to be provided to the Chief Executive.

Action: Directors

2.9 The Director of Employment Relations Services reported that, following consultation with DfE, minor changes have been identified to the Agency's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (paragraph 2.12 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Given the current political situation, it is unclear whether Ministerial sign-off of a revised Code will be possible in the near future.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.10 Disability awareness training will be arranged for staff following the move to James House (paragraph 2.13 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive/Secretary

2.11 It was noted that the Board discussed legal advice regarding a governance matter at their meeting in January 2022 (paragraph 2.14 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). In light of this, the Chief Executive is preparing revised Standing Orders for discussion at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on 7 March 2022.

Action: Chief Executive

2.12 Directors to encourage staff, particularly those in junior grades, to participate in the Leadership Development Programme (paragraph 2.15 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). HR is agreeing dates for the fourth cohort with the Clinton Institute, QUB.

Action: Directors

2.13 The Board paper on the Statutory Role of the Labour Relations Agency to issue to staff via the Team Briefing (paragraph 2.16 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The paper will also be uploaded to the Intranet.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services/Secretary

2.14 The Chief Executive and Director of Employment Relations Services met with representatives from the Careers Service to discuss ways of providing information to young people about their employment rights (paragraph 3.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Communications Manager will progress contacts in area learning networks to see if they are potential vehicles to access people.

Action: Chief Executive

2.15 A number of Employment Relations Managers will be attending the February 2022 Board meeting to present the business priorities for 2022-23 (paragraph 3.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.16 Preparations for the launch of the online document toolkit will be progressed with the Communications and Advisory Services Managers (paragraph 4.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.17 The Chief Executive has highlighted the backlog of requests for Independent Appeals Hearings in his report to the Board (paragraph 4.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The Director of Employment Relations Services will provide a verbal update at the Board meeting.

2.18 The IT Manager has prepared a background report on CMRS transition arrangements that will be used to brief the Board at their meeting in February 2022 (paragraph 4.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). On boarding with new provider is progressing, but the former provider needs to complete outstanding issues. Meeting to be arranged with the new provider.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.19 The IT Manager will be including transition arrangements in the business case for IT Assist (paragraph 4.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The revised business case will be resubmitted to DfE.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.20 Refresher training was provided for Business Support Service (BST) staff on raising awareness and understanding of Early Conciliation (paragraph 4.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Feedback from staff was positive.

2.21 It was hoped that the NI Executive will clarify changes to public health guidance this week (paragraph 4.8 of the minutes of the last meeting refers), which will then provide the cue for the Agency to promote the hybrid working guidance.

Action: Chief Executive

2.22 It was noted that other actions listed in the minutes will be dealt with under the Business Plan Performance Report (agenda item 7).

3. Chief Executive's Update

3.1 It was noted that the Chief Executive will be on annual leave from 16-25 March; March 2022 Board papers to be prepared in advance.

Action: SLT

3.2 The draft Hybrid Working Policy was discussed at JNCC on 10 February 2022, which was followed by an email from the Chief Executive to all staff on 11 February informing them that the SLT had decided on a proposition regarding the proportion of time to be spent working in the office. The Branch Chair expressed concern at the manner in which this issue had been communicated. It was noted that consultation on the draft policy will need to be managed sensitively.

3.3 The Chief Executive will be meeting Department of Finance representatives to discuss an anticipated slippage in the James House relocation timetable.

Action: Chief Executive

3.4 In the meantime, it was noted that the Accommodation Project Manager is exploring options for possible reduced car parking rates; and arrangements will be made for Translink to brief staff on public transport journey planning and fare options.

3.5 It was agreed that, with a new Certification Officer being recruited, the Service Level Agreement should be reviewed.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4. Directors' Updates

4.1 The Directors provided updates on current activities.

4.2 The Director of Employment Relations Services reported that staff absence is impacting on services. Contingency arrangements are being considered.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

4.3 The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on plans for the migration of the IT server environment into the Regional Office and the need to co-ordinate this in a way that avoids any loss of IT services in Head Office. Separate discussion to be arranged between the Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, and the IT Manager to agree timeline.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4.4 Terms of reference for transformation have been agreed with TUS; a proposal for consultancy support is awaited. The timeframe for completion of the review is to be agreed. Transformation proposals will be outlined to the March 2022 Board meeting. SLT meeting to be arranged for the week commencing 28 April to discuss detailed proposals. In the meantime, progress will be reviewed at the next formal SLT meeting.

Action: SLT

5. Board Matters

Actions arising from the last Board meeting

5.1 The SLT noted the actions arising from the last Board meeting (paper SLT 02-02/22).

Action: Director of Corporate Services

Preparation for the next Board meeting

5.2 The key agenda items for the February and March 2022 Board meetings were noted (paper SLT 03-02/22 and paper SLT 04-02/22).

5.3 The next Board meeting will be held in person. The meeting will be a business planning workshop with a presentation by SLT and SMT members. Chief Executive to prepare presentation for comment by Directors.

Action: SLT

- 5.4 With the absence of a functioning Executive, there is a risk that the Agency may start 2022-23 with only a baseline budget, without the additional funding sought. The Chief Executive will seek Board approval that the budget is set on forecast needs, rather than baseline. This will allow current temporary staffing arrangements to continue.

Action: Chief Executive

6. People Matters

- 6.1 The SLT noted the HR Metrics (paper SLT 05-02/22).
- 6.2 The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee had a positive discussion on the results of the recent staff survey. An action plan is currently with TUS for comment.
- 6.3 In conjunction with the annual health checks being organised during week commencing 28 March 2022, HR has proposed that staff are allocated three hours for health and wellbeing activities. This could be by way of an extended lunch period for all staff; the practicalities of such an arrangement will be explored.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

7. Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 31 January 2022

- 7.1 The SLT noted the Business Plan Performance Report (paper SLT 06-02/22).
- 7.2 It was noted that some objectives may not be met before the year-end and may need to be carried forward into the Business Plan for 2022-23.

8. Finance Matters – Management Accounts for the period ended 31 January 2022

- 8.1 The Director of Corporate Services presented the Management Accounts for the period ended 31 January 2022 (paper SLT 07-02/22).
- 8.2 It was noted that within the accounts there is now an additional line for accommodation project costs, following an audit recommendation.
- 8.3 The Director of Corporate Services and Finance Officer continue to meet on a weekly basis to monitor expenditure. The Agency is on track to meet financial targets.

9. Corporate Risk Register

- 9.1 The SLT noted the Corporate Risk Register (paper SLT 08-02/22).
- 9.2 There are no significant changes to the Register; actions have been updated regarding Omicron and year-end budget monitoring.
- 9.3 The Chief Executive will prepare a prototype of a new approach to the Risk Register for approval by ARAC on 7 March 2022.

Action: Chief Executive

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 None.

11. Date of Next Meeting

- 11.1 The next formal SLT meeting will be on 15 March 2022 at 10.00 am, by videoconference.

Action: Secretary