

**MINUTES OF THE 489th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD
HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 10.00AM AT THE LABOUR RELATIONS
AGENCY HEAD OFFICE, JAMES HOUSE, 2-4 CROMAC AVENUE, BELFAST, BT7 2JA**

Present: Gordon Milligan (Chair)
Geraldine Alexander
Elizabeth Armstrong
Kevin McCabe
Orla Sheils
Mark Spence
John Taylor
Lee Wilson
Clare Duffield

In Attendance: Don Leeson Chief Executive
Mark McAllister Director of Employment Relations Services
Anne Dorbie Acting Director of Corporate Services
Virginia Aldana Boardroom Apprentice
Colin Jack DfE
Laurence Rogers DfE
Oliver Murray Executive Assistant

Apologies: Sarah Havlin

The Board welcomed **Anne Dorbie** to her first Board meeting. Anne has taken the role of Acting Director of Corporate Services as **Paul Lowe** remains absent on sick leave, until at least 30 November 2023.

The Board Welcomed **Colin Jack** and **Laurence Rogers** of DfE, who joined to discuss the Partnership Agreement.

Declarations of Interest: None.

1. Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 A meeting was held with **Gerry Murphy** regarding the Roundtable Forum's terms of reference. An inaugural meeting to launch of the new Engagement Forum was noted for possibly late January.
- 1.2 Plans to meet with Agency staff for lunch after the December Board meeting noted. This would be an opportunity for Board members to show their appreciation of colleagues' work during the past year and get to know staff a little better.

Action: Executive Assistant

2. Horizon Scanning for Opportunities and Risks

2.1 The **Director of Employment Services** noted meeting with the President of the Industrial Tribunals held regarding Holiday Pay conciliation cases and the effect it would potentially have on Agency workload. This will be a huge undertaking due to the workload involved. A wide-ranging discussion was held regarding the Agency's options for moving forward. This will be a standard agenda item going forward.

2.2 **Clare Duffield** noted the potential conflict of interest regarding holiday pay conciliation cases.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Emp. Services

2.3 The **Chief Executive** noted the long term absence on sick leave of the **Director of Corporate Services**, with **Anne Dorbie** covering role in interim period. IT Manager **Paul Herink** is planning to retire. In his place, **Jim McAllister** has been brought in as IT Project Manager, beginning his new role on Monday. An update was given regarding the recruitment of a number of new staff members who have joined the Agency on agency contracts to cover for absences, pending recruitment exercises or the return to work of the substantive post holder.

Action: Chief Executive

3. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting

3.1 Minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 October 2023 (paper BP01-11/23) were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting for publication on the Agency's website.

Action: Executive Assistant

4. Action Points from Previous Board Meetings

4.1 The Chief Executive presented the progress report on actions from previous Board meetings (paper BP02-11/23), which was noted by the Board.

4.2 Increased funding has been sought from DfE to settle the Agency's dilapidations liability at the amount recommended by the Surveyor.

4.3 Planned recruitment exercise for arbitrators noted. Initial enquires have been made regarding procurement protocols for outsourcing the process to a specialist assessment centre, with quotes awaited.

4.4 An update was given regarding the proposed transfer of the Industrial Court's secretariat to the Certification. **Tommy Wright** has been engaged

to carry out review of staffing needs for Cert Office.

- 4.5 Business Consultancy Service review of Agency has been drafted, with a final report to be presented to the Board in the December meeting.
- 4.6 Training availability for new Audit and Risk Assurance Committee members was noted.
- 4.7 Plans for the proposed Flexible Working Conference in March 2024 were noted. This will be in partnership with DfE.
- 4.8 An update was given regarding the Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Employment Relations

5. Chief Executive's Report

- 5.1 The Chief Executive presented the report (paper BP03-11/23), which was noted by the Board.
- 5.2 It was noted that the Agency will sponsor 'Employer of the Year' award at this year's Business Eye awards, as well as being shortlisted for the Diversity & inclusion Award. Members of Board and staff will be in attendance.

Action: Chief Executive

- 5.3 The Agency has been actively involved in supporting employers and employees impacted by the recent flooding in Downpatrick. A discussion was held on the significant effect the flooding has had on businesses in the South Down area.
- 5.4 The **Director of Employment Relations Services** delivered his annual review of year at the Annual Review of Employment Law 2023 on 7 November 2023. This was repeated at a joint event with CIPD NI on 15 November 2023 in the North West Regional College.
- 5.5 The Chief Executive has been nominated to the finalist stage of the Institute of Directors' **Director of the Year** awards in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion category. The award winners will be announced at an event on 8 December 2023.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Employment Relations Services

6. The Future of the Mediation Service

- 6.1 The Director of Employment Relations presented the Future of the Mediation Service (Paper BP04–11/23), which was approved by the Board.
- 6.2 An overview of mediation services was given. This led to a detailed discussion regarding mediation work to date, as well as the options for a strategy going forward.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

7. Partnership Agreement between the Department for the Economy and the Labour Relations Agency

- 7.1 **Colin Jack** and **Laurence Rogers** noted partnership with the Agency and discussed development of Partnership Agreement. A detailed discussion was held regarding the relationship between DfE and the Agency.
- 7.2 The Partnership Agreement was agreed by the Board.

8. Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 31 October 2023

- 8.1 The **Director of Employment Relations** presented Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 31 October 2023 (paper BP06-11/23), which was noted by the Board.
- 8.2 Expectations of collective action discussed.
- 8.3 Current call volumes have increased, with redundancy-related calls also rising.
- 8.4 An update was given regarding the launch of Independent Health and Care partnership.
- 8.5 The ‘employee representative’ pilot programme was delivered virtually on 5 and 12 October 2023 with 10 new employee representatives participating. Overall, the programme was well received with positive feedback provided by attendees.
- 8.6 The **Chief Executive** noted that the research report on Good Employment Relations and Productivity associated policy brief are being finalised for publication and a dissemination strategy is being developed.
- 8.7 The **Acting Director of Corporate Services** gave an update on IT risks currently being considered.
- 8.8 The risk of the Regional Office’s accommodation lease was noted.

9. Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 October 2023

9.1 The **Acting Director of Corporate Services** presented the Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 October 2023 report (paper BP03-10/23), which was noted by the Board.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 There was no other business.

11. Date of Next Meeting

11.1 The next meeting of the Board will be on 13 December 2023 at 10.00am in James House. The draft agenda for the meeting (paper BP08-11/23) was noted by the Board.

11.2 Plans for the Social Committee to work on catering plans following the meeting were noted.

Action: Executive Assistant