

**MINUTES OF THE 496<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD  
HELD ON 28 AUGUST 2024 AT 10.00AM AT ULSTER UNIVERSITY, MAGEE CAMPUS,  
NORTHLAND ROAD, DERRY/LONDONDERRY BT48 7JL**

**Present:** Gordon Milligan (Chair)  
Geraldine Alexander  
Elizabeth Armstrong  
Kevin McCabe  
Orla Sheils  
Mark Spence

**In Attendance:** Don Leeson Chief Executive  
Anne Dorbie Interim Director of Corporate Services  
Paul Lowe Temporary Director of Programme Delivery  
Mark McAllister Director of Employment Relations Services  
Oliver Murray Executive Assistant  
Colin Jack Department for the Economy (DfE) (agenda item 6)  
Claire Kilpatrick Employment Relations Manager (agenda item 7)  
Kellie Cooke Employment Relations Officer (agenda item 7)  
Fionn Davey NIPSA Branch 180 Chair (agenda item 8)

**Apologies:** Clare Duffield  
Sarah Havlin  
John Taylor  
Lee Wilson

The meeting was held at Ulster University's Magee Campus as part of the Board's renewed commitment to hold one meeting per year in Derry/Londonderry where the Agency has a Regional Office.

This was a hybrid meeting with one staff member attending by videoconference.

This was Don Leeson's last Board meeting as Chief Executive before Mark McAllister takes over the role from September 2024. The Board formally expressed its appreciation for Don's leadership of the Agency for the past four years; he thanked Board members for their support during this period.

The Board meeting was followed by a reception for local stakeholders, which was also attended by Regional Office staff and DfE .

**Declarations of Interest:** None.

## 1. Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The Chair briefed the Board on a statement condemning recent racist attacks and civil unrest in Belfast issued by the business and trade union leaders represented on the Engagement Forum. The statement, which reaffirmed support for the Joint Declaration of Protection signed in 2017, received widespread online and newspaper coverage. It was noted that this matter will be discussed at the next Forum meeting on 2 September 2024.
- 1.2 The Chair reported that, following an external recruitment competition, Employment Relations Manager Elaine Clarke has been appointed as the Agency's new Director of Employment Relations Services. She succeeds Mark McAllister when he takes up the Chief Executive post in September 2024. The Board congratulated the new Director on her appointment.
- 1.3 The Board noted that Maxine Orr was sworn into office as the new President of the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal on 19 August 2024. It was agreed to write to the President to congratulate her on her appointment.

**Action: Chair**

## 2. Horizon Scanning for Opportunities and Risks

- 2.1 The Director of Employment Relations Services provided an update on holiday pay conciliation.

## 3. Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 26 June 2024

- 3.1 The minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 June 2024 (paper BP01-08/24) 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 BP02-08/24), which was noted by the Board.
- 4.2 The Director of Employment Relations Services reported that there had been a good response to the recruitment exercise to appoint new Arbitrators and Chairs of Independent Appeal Panel. Interviews are scheduled for the end of August and early September 2024.

**Action: Directors of Employment Relations Services/Corporate Services**

- 4.3 The Board noted that two focus groups of stakeholders are being arranged to take place in October/November 2024 to gather views on the continuing relevance of the Agency's name. The outcome of these discussions, together with any recommendations regarding the Agency's name, will be reported to the Board in due course.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **5. Chief Executive's Report**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive presented the report (paper BP03-08/24), which was noted by the Board.

- 5.2 The Director of Programme Delivery briefed Board members on progress in respect of the transformation programme. The Board noted that the staff conference on 11 September 2024 will be used to finalise arrangements for restructuring of the Employment Relations Services Directorate into multi-disciplinary teams. The staff concerned have been allocated to their new teams, which will come into being with effect from 7 October 2024.

- 5.3 The Board congratulated everyone involved in the Agency retaining Investors in People Gold accreditation following reassessment. The Assessor's report and action plan to achieve Platinum accreditation will be presented to the next Board meeting.

**Action: Chief Executive**

- 5.4 The Board noted the Agency's work to support employers and employees impacted by recent racist attacks and civil unrest in Belfast and passed on their appreciation to the staff involved.

- 5.5 The Chief Executive briefed the Board on a planned panel discussion on 19 September 2024 about how male employees can help eliminate workplace sexual harassment. Geraldine Alexander is one of the panellists. The Board noted how this discussion links to the workplace strand of the forthcoming Executive Strategy on Ending Violence against Women and Girls in which the Agency is likely to be invited to play a leading role. Board members will be invited to the event.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **6. Consultation on Proposed New Employment Rights Legislation – presentation by the Department for the Economy**

- 6.1 The Chair welcomed Colin Jack, Director of Business and Employment Regulation at the Department for the Economy (DfE), to the meeting.

- 6.2 The Director of Business and Employment Regulation briefed the Board on DfE's consultation on the proposed contents of 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill. The Board noted that the consultation document was launched by the Minister for the Economy on 1 July, with the proposed legislative changes grouped under four of the elements of the Carnegie Framework for a 'good job'. The 13-week public consultation period is due to end on 30 September 2024.
- 6.3 The Board further noted that, in parallel, DfE is also consulting on implementation of the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) 2022. The consultation period for this ends on 27 September 2024.
- 6.4 In discussion, it was noted that the new UK Government is developing its proposals in respect of new employment rights. As employment rights are a devolved matter, these will be considered by DfE in due course and, where appropriate, subject to further consultation if the Minister considers them relevant for adoption in NI.
- 6.5 DfE anticipates primary legislation to implement new employment rights beginning passage through the Assembly in 2026. However, it was noted that some rights requiring only secondary legislation could be progressed earlier than this.
- 6.6 The Board noted the resourcing implications for the Agency of changes in employment legislation in respect of awareness-raising, preparing guidance and codes of practice, and a wider range of jurisdictions for conciliation. Resourcing plans will be kept under review as the legislative proposals are developed and as the implementation timetable becomes clearer.
- 6.7 The Board thanked the Director of Business and Employment Regulation for attending the meeting and the helpful presentation and discussion.

## **7. Briefing on the Work of the Regional Office**

- 7.1 The Chair welcomed Claire Kilpatrick and Kellie Cooke to the meeting who briefed the Board on the work of the Regional Office.
- 7.2 The Board noted that the number of staff at the Regional Office has almost doubled in recent years and how its multidisciplinary team approach has informed planned restructuring of the wider Employment Services Directorate.

7.3 Board members were invited to attend a seminar the Agency has organised, in partnership with CIPD NI, Mediation NI and Ulster University, on the value of workplace mediation. This is being held in the Great Hall on the Magee Campus on 16 October 2024. Further information will be sent to Board members.

**Action: Executive Assistant**

7.4 The Board thanked Kellie Cook for agreeing to train Turks and Caicos Islands Government officials in conciliation in September 2024.

7.5 The Board thanked the Regional Office staff for their briefing.

## **8. Annual Employment Relations Update from the Trade Union Side**

8.1 The Chair welcomed Fionn Davey, Chair of the Agency's Trade Union Branch, to the meeting.

8.2 The Chair of the Agency's Trade Union Branch briefed the Board on the current employment relations climate within the organisation. It was noted that this is an important safeguard within the Agency's governance arrangements, which allows the trade union direct access to the Board, and it is good practice to allow employees' voice to be heard in the Boardroom.

8.3 The Branch Chair confirmed that employment relations continue to be positive and partnership working with the Senior Leadership remains very strong.

8.4 The Board noted that the current focus for union members, who comprise around 90% of staff, is the transformation programme. The Branch Chair confirmed that most members are supportive of the forthcoming changes.

8.5 The Board thanked the Branch Chair and Committee members for the work they do to support staff and their positive attitude to partnership working.

## **9. Senior Leadership Team Review: SLT Job Descriptions**

9.1 The draft job description for the proposed additional Director post, and consequential changes to the Director of Corporate Services' job description, which emanated from the recent SLT review, were noted by the Board (paper BPO4-08/24).

- 9.2 It was agreed to hold off agreement of the job descriptions until after the Board Strategy Day (agenda item 10 below) to ensure they align with the strategic direction of the emerging new Corporate Plan. In the meantime, Board members were invited to comment on the draft job descriptions by email to the Chief Executive.

**Action: Board members**

## **10. Revised Programme for the Board Strategy Day**

- 10.1 The Chief Executive presented the revised programme for the Board Strategy Day (paper BP05-08/24), which was approved by the Board. Arrangements will be finalised by the Chief Executive and Executive Assistant.

**Action: Chief Executive/Executive Assistant**

- 10.2 It was noted that the key focus of the event will be development of the Agency's Corporate Plan for 2025-29, building on an earlier workshop involving the Senior Management Team. DfE's Permanent Secretary and Director of Business and Employment Regulation have agreed to attend to provide input in respect of horizon scanning for the Corporate Plan.

- 10.3 The Board also noted that the programme will include a discussion on the Agency's key performance indicators, which are being reviewed in light of the emerging new Corporate Plan as part of the three-year external governance review being undertaken by EY.

## **11. CMRS Upgrade – Business Case**

- 11.1 The Director of Programme Delivery presented the business case for the upgrade of the Agency's case management system (paper BP06-08/24), which was approved by the Board.

- 11.2 It was noted that, given the value of the business case, DfE approval is also required. The Board will be informed of any significant change to the business case that results from DfE's consideration of it.

**Action: Director of Programme Delivery**

## **12. Finance and Personnel Committee – Report on Meeting held on 6 August 2024**

- 12.1 The Committee Chair presented the report on the Finance and Personnel Committee, which was held on 6 August 2024 (paper BP07-08/24), which was noted by the Board.

**13. Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 31 July 2024**

13.1 The Board noted the Business Plan Performance Report for the period ended 31 July 2024 (paper BP08-08/24).

**14. Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 May 2024**

14.1 The Board noted the Management Accounts for the period ended 31 July 2024 (paper BP09-08/24).

**15. Any Other Business**

15.1 It was agreed to write to Ulster University to thank them for hosting the Board meeting and reception for local stakeholders.

**Action: Chief Executive**

**16. Review of the meeting**

16.1 Board members confirmed that they were content with the quality of papers provided and discussion at the meeting.

**17. Date of Next Meeting**

17.1 The draft agenda for the next Board meeting, which will be held on 26 September 2024, was noted (paper BP10-08/24).

**Action: Executive Assistant**