

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM HELD AT 10.00AM
ON TUESDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2021
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Present:

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| Don Leeson | Chief Executive (Chair) |
| Avril Alexander | Employment Relations Manager (ERM) |
| Fionn Davey | Chair, NIPSA Branch 180 |
| Paul Lowe | Interim Director of Corporate Services |
| Mark McAllister | Director of Employment Relations Services |
| Alison Wolfe | Minute Secretary |

Apologies: Neill Wallace Employment Relations Manager (ERM)

The Chief Executive welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

**1. Minutes from the Senior Leadership Team meeting held on 19 January 2021
(paper SLT 01-02/21)**

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 were agreed for publication on the Agency's website.

Action: Secretary

2. Actions arising from the previous meeting

2.1 Directors have held initial discussions about mentoring ERMs while on SLT in terms of providing information on governance arrangements, Board papers, and insight into the work of the other Directorate in line with individual requirements. It was agreed to put in place structured arrangements for the remainder of the current SMT members' time on SLT.

Action: Directors

2.2 The Agency met with IT Assist on 1 February 2021 to discuss the feasibility of their support for the Agency's IT systems. The IT Manager is preparing a paper specifying requirements post-relocation to James House for discussion with IT Assist. If 'on boarding' to IT Assist is not feasible, a procurement exercise will be undertaken to identify a private sector provider in time for the move to James House.

Action: Chief Executive/Interim Director of Corporate Services

2.3 A response is awaited from DfE to the Agency's comments on the initial draft Partnership Agreement.

Action: Chief Executive

2.4 The Chief Executive has agreed with his counterpart in the Workplace Relations Commission that it would not be feasible to host the annual International Agencies conference this year on the island of Ireland; another country is interested in hosting the event in 2022. As an alternative to a conference in 2021, it is being proposed that each of the international agencies prepares a country report as a webinar.

Action: Chief Executive

2.5 In light of the above, the Agency has commenced a procurement exercise to engage an events management company to progress work on an employment relations conference in early 2022. The format of the conference will depend on public health guidance at the time; contingency arrangements will be in place for a virtual conference if it is not possible to hold an in-person event.

Action: Chief Executive

2.6 It was agreed that it would not be feasible to hold a staff conference in March 2021. Consideration will be given to holding a conference later in the year, following appointment of a new Chair and Board members and development of the Corporate Plan 2021-25.

Action: SLT

3. Chief Executive's Update

3.1 The Finance and Personnel Committee meets on 2 March; papers are due for issue on 23 February 2021.

Action: Chief Executive/Interim Director of Corporate Services

3.2 Arrangements to be made to hold an informal meeting of the Joint Negotiation and Consultative Committee (JNCC) to discuss a range of recruitment issues.

Action: Secretary

3.3 The Chief Executive reported on a CIPD webinar he attended on Covid-19 vaccine and the workplace. CIPD have produced guidance around vaccine in the workplace and the webinar discussed organisations having vaccine policies in place. It was agreed that the Agency should develop a policy ahead of possible re-opening of premises in May/June 2021. It was agreed to discuss the approach to policy at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meeting on 23 February 2021.

Action: Interim Director of Corporate Services

3.4 It was noted that the Workplace Information Service (WIS) has already received queries dealing with vaccine issues and it is anticipated that further advisory work will ensue. The Agency's vaccine policy will be prepared as a model policy for use in advisory work. The Engagement Forum will be consulted on this.

Action: SLT

3.5 It was noted that Internal Audit follow-up review commences on 22 February 2021 to verify that recommendations from 2019-20 have been implemented.

3.6 The SLT will meet the legal adviser to discuss advice received in connection with the Court of Appeal judgement involving the Charity Commission for NI. The Chief Executive will provide an update to the Board and will highlight the issue to DfE as primary legislation will be required to address earlier legislative shortcomings.

Action: SLT

3.7 The Chief Executive reported on his meeting with the Investors in People (IiP) assessor to discuss steps to achieve IiP Platinum. The assessor has recommended an adviser to develop an action plan.

Action: Interim Director of Corporate Services

3.8 The Chief Executive reported on his meeting with the Chief Executive of Healthy Place to Work who has developed a global standard on health and wellbeing in the workplace. Consideration is being given to the possibility of a project with Healthy Place to Work to further investigate stress levels within the Agency.

Action: Chief Executive

3.9 As part of the induction process the Chief Executive met with the new EOII in the Business Support Team. A meeting has also been arranged with the new employment agency workers.

Action: Chief Executive

4. Directors' Updates

4.1 The Director of Employment Relations Services highlighted a number of issues, including the following:

4.1.1 Conciliation figures remain consistently high with an average of 12 Early Conciliation (EC) cases and two individual employer-led requests per day. Progress has been made on a number of the holiday pay projects.

4.1.2 New webinars are being progressed.

- 4.1.3 Templates for the new Document Review Service are being developed; the current vetting service has been paused to facilitate this.
- 4.1.4 The possibility of partnership working with Invest NI regarding the delivery of some of their programmes.
- 4.1.5 Menopause Guidance is progressing.
- 4.1.6 Pregnancy through Covid 'live' webinar is scheduled for end March 2021.
- 4.1.7 A meeting with the NI Teachers' Council is being scheduled to discuss the review of independent appeals.
- 4.1.8 There have been more than 18,000 calls to the WIS Team to date; an almost 30% increase on the same period last year.
- 4.1.9 WIS managers require greater access to the telephony system to run reports and update recordings.

Action: Directors

- 4.2 The Director of Corporate Services highlighted a number of issues, including the following:
 - 4.2.1 Audit planning meeting with PwC on behalf of the NI Audit Office who will complete annual audit; work will commence in May with a view to reporting the outcome to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) in June 2021.
 - 4.2.2 Focus on corporate planning, with input from ERMs being sought prior to presentation to Board.
 - 4.2.3 Useful meeting last week with CIPD NI to discuss their awards processes and recognition; also discussed possibility of partnership work. Chief Executive is due to meet the former Chair of CIPD NI.
 - 4.2.4 Work on governance policies progressing for presentation to ARAC and the Board in June. The Trade Union Side (TUS) will be consulted on the policies that affect staff.
 - 4.2.5 Procurement exercise underway for a provider of the Leadership Development Programme for a third cohort of staff.
 - 4.2.6 Virtual induction arrangements are being trialled with new staff. If successful, these will be shared with other organisations.
 - 4.2.7 The closing date for the recruitment exercise for new Employment Relations Officers is Friday, 19 February.
 - 4.2.8 The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee will finalise the action plan regarding stress at its meeting on 23 February 2021.
 - 4.2.9 Plans are in place to review the Head Office Covid-19 risk assessment.
 - 4.2.10 The guidance regarding the use of EC web portal by representatives has been put place.
 - 4.2.11 A campaign to launch the research report on workplace dispute handling has been formulated setting out key messages along with plans to use social and traditional media.

- 4.2.12 Weekly updates are now being provided to staff on IT developments and issues.
- 4.2.13 The Customer Service Excellence assessment is scheduled for 16/18 March.
- 4.2.14 The business case for webinar evaluation arrangements to inform the Agency's performance scorecards is being prepared.
- 4.2.15 Work to underpin the Agency's status as a provider of official statistics is continuing.

4.3 It was noted that take-up by staff of temporary promotion opportunities was disappointing. The HR Team has been asked to look at support that could be provided to staff on interview preparation and confidence building.

Action: Chief Executive

4.4 The Chief Executive reported that, following a number of meetings with the service provider, a fixed price to complete work on web portal enhancements has been agreed. The Chief Executive will update the Board at the next meeting.

Action: Chief Executive

5. Board Matters

Actions arising from the last Board meeting (Paper SLT 02-02/21)

5.1 The Chief Executive reported that, as the February Board meeting will be foreshortened to facilitate the corporate planning workshop, the minutes from the January meeting will be submitted to the March 2021 meeting for approval.

Action: Secretary

Preparation for the next Board meeting (Paper SLT 03-02/21)

5.2 The Agency response to consultation on the draft Programme for Government will be cleared with the Board via correspondence, rather than tabled at the next Board meeting. The closing date for responses to The Executive Office is 22 March 2021.

Action: Director Corporate Services

6. People Matters

HR metrics (Paper SLT 04-02/21)

- 6.1 The SLT noted the HR Metrics.
- 6.2 The Branch Chair expressed her concern about stress levels and the correlation with annual leave and pressures of work. SLT recognises health and wellbeing issues and the need to encourage staff to take annual leave and rest periods. As noted earlier, an action plan is being developed to address stress levels.

Other people matters

- 6.3 The Chief Executive reported that he is meeting with HR to review temporary staffing arrangements. The Branch Chair emphasised that the TUS prefers staff to have substantive posts, rather than temporary arrangements. The Chief Executive said there were two aspects to consider regarding this: the need to move away from one-year budgets to long term funding arrangements; and the need for a degree of temporary arrangements to respond to spikes in work.
- 6.4 The HR Team is developing proposals for processes to address some of the temporary arrangements, including filling Administrative Officer vacancies. These proposals will be discussed with the SLT and TUS before being finalised.

Action: Chief Executive/Interim Director of Corporate Services

7. Performance against Business Plan for the period ended 31 January 2021 (Paper SLT 05-02/21)

- 7.1 SLT agreed amendments to the report.

Action: SLT

8. Finance Matters

Management Accounts for the period ended 31 January 2021 (Paper SLT 06-02/21)

- 8.1 The Chief Executive said that despite an underspend the Agency expects to achieve its financial target. There are a number of capital projects awaiting approval.

9. Corporate Risk Register (Paper SLT 07-02/21)

- 9.1 The updated Risk Register was noted.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 There was no other business.

11. Date of Next Meetings

11.1 The next formal SLT meeting will be on 16 March 2021 at 10.00 am, by videoconference.

Action: Secretary