

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM HELD AT 9.00am
ON 13 APRIL 2021 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Present:

Don Leeson	Chief Executive (Chair)
Paul Lowe	Interim Director of Corporate Services
Mark McAllister	Director of Employment Relations Services
Helen Smyth	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
Alison Wolfe	Minute Secretary

Apologies:

Claire Kilpatrick	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
Fionn Davey	Chair, NIPSA Branch 180

The Chief Executive welcomed Helen Smyth and, in her absence, Claire Kilpatrick who have joined the SLT for three months as part of the Senior Management Team (SMT) development initiative.

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Minutes from the Senior Leadership Team meeting held on 16 March 2021

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 were agreed for publication on the Agency's website (paper SLT 01-04/21).

Action: Secretary

2. Actions arising from the previous meeting

2.1 The Chief Executive reported feedback from the two SMT members who had recently completed their rota on the SLT. Both confirmed that it had been a worthwhile experience and that they felt their input was listened to and valued. However, they were disappointed not to be able to attend Board meetings. The Chief Executive raised this issue with the Chair and it was agreed to seek the Board's agreement to invite ERMs to one Board meeting and one of each of the sub-committee meetings during their term on SLT. They will also be invited to attend meetings of the NI Engagement Forum and observe one Oversight and Liaison meeting with DfE.

Action: Chief Executive

2.2 It was noted that Directors have agreed a format to mentor ERMs during their term on SLT (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). This includes agreeing learning objectives, and providing insights into the preparation of Board papers and strategic decision-making.

- 2.3 The Chief Executive provided an update on a meeting with IT Assist to discuss technical requirements for IS managed services in James House (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). IT Assist will prepare its response to the Agency's requirements and provide costings for inclusion in the Agency's option appraisal for future service provision.
Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services
- 2.4 The Agency awaits a response from DfE to comments provided on the initial draft Partnership Agreement (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.5 It was noted that there have been no developments regarding the next International Agencies' event (paragraph 2.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). This will be raised with the Chief Executive of the Workplace Relations Commission.
Action: Chief Executive
- 2.6 It was noted that an events management company has been appointed to progress work on the employment relations conference in 2022 (paragraph 2.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). As the event is to be held jointly with DfE and the Roundtable, it was agreed to seek stakeholders representative to join a working group to curate the programme.
Action: Chief Executive
- 2.7 It was noted that some concerns have been expressed about the draft Covid vaccine in the workplace guidance (paragraph 2.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). In particular, whether there might be an overlap with Government's emerging policy proposals and the data protection implications of collecting information regarding employees' vaccinations. The Chief Executive subsequently sought DfE's views who commented that it would be useful to reference developments regarding workplace Covid testing. It was agreed to update the policy in respect of these matters and present the revised guidance at the Engagement Forum meeting on 21 April 2021.
Action: Director of Employment Relations Services/Helen Smyth
- 2.8 The Departmental Solicitor's Office has confirmed that the shortcoming in the Agency's founding legislation requires primary legislation to address this (paragraph 2.8 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A suitable legislative vehicle is being sought by DfE.
- 2.9 It was noted that a stakeholder's legal advice regarding independent appeals is still awaited (paragraph 2.9 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
Action: Director Employment Relations Services

2.10 It was noted that the Agency's response to the draft Programme for Government consultation exercise has been submitted (paragraph 2.10 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.11 It was noted that there have been no developments regarding the Agency's bid for additional funding under the NI Protocol budget to create a Knowledge Manager post (paragraph 3.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). However, it was agreed to progress development of a job description for this.

Action: Directors

2.12 It was noted that two members of staff have volunteered to takeover from colleagues on the Employment Relations Group (ERG) and that all other members have agreed to continue (paragraph 6.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The next ERG meeting is scheduled for 14 April 2021.

2.13 As part of the Board induction programme, visits to Agency premises and Killymeal House will be arranged as soon as it is safe to do so (paragraph 7.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive

2.14 The Chief Executive reported that the Department of Finance has procured a surveyor to estimate the Agency's liability for Head Office dilapidations (paragraph 8.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.15 The Chief Executive reported partnership working with CIPD and others will be progressed in the context of the Business Plan for 2021-22 (paragraph 10.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

3. Chief Executive's Update

3.1 The Chief Executive reported that the announcement of new Board members continues to be awaited. Introductory meetings between Directors and the Secretary and the new Chair are to be arranged.

Action: Secretary

3.2 As part of the Board induction programme, the SLT will give a presentation on the work of the Agency to the new Chair and Board members. It was agreed to update the presentation prepared for the Boardroom Apprentice. Arrangements will also be made for the new Chair to meet current Board members.

Action: All

3.3 It was noted that the next meeting of the Employment Relations Roundtable is on 15 April 2021. The Chief Executive will prepare an action plan for the Roundtable's work for the year ahead. The Chief Executive and Director of Employment Relations Services will also present the Agency's draft Corporate Plan for comments from Roundtable members.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Employment Relations Services

3.4 It was noted that the Interim Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service will host a breakfast meeting of the Engagement Forum on 10 May 2021 to discuss social partnerships. SLT members are invited to attend.

Action: Chief Executive

3.5 The Chief Executive reported on his participation on Radio Ulster 'On Your Behalf' programme on 10 April 2021. It was noted that the presenter expressed an interest in the forthcoming menopause at work guidance. It was agreed to seek the views of the partners producing this on the possibility of promoting the guidance via the programme.

Action: Helen Smyth

3.6 The Chief Executive reported that he is in discussion with Tom Boydell regarding a possible workshop for the SMT to support work towards the Agency being an exemplar employer and achieving Investors in People (IiP) Platinum. It may also be worthwhile to inviting the IiP adviser to attend. In the meantime, the Chief Executive will share some of Tom's publications with the SLT.

Action: Chief Executive

4. Directors' Updates

4.1 Both Directors provided an update on the work of their respective Directorates.

4.2 It was agreed, in light of a customer complaint, to extend planned complaint handling training to all SMT members.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

4.3 It was agreed that additional resources might be needed to project manage the clearance of Head Office premises and relocation to James House. This will be considered in light of wider resourcing considerations (paragraph 8.1 below refers).

Action: Chief Executive/Directors

4.4 Helen Smyth reported that a number of pre-recorded webinars are available to be published on the website, subject to an appropriate platform being sourced.

Action: Director of Corporate Services/Helen Smyth

5. Board Matters

Induction arrangements for the new Chair/Board members

5.1 This matter was dealt with at paragraph 3.2 above.

Preparation for the next Board meeting

5.2 The key agenda items for the May 2021 Board meeting were agreed.

5.3 It was agreed that the paper being prepared for DfE on EC evaluation should be presented to the June 2021 Board meeting for approval.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

6. People Matters

HR Metrics

6.1 The HR metrics were noted (paper SLT 02-04/21).

6.2 It was agreed to set a deadline of 31 May 2021 for the completion of appraisals.

Action: Director Corporate Services

People Matters

6.3 Interviews with the Healthy Place to Work organisation are being scheduled for end April 2021 to probe stress-related matters. Interviewees will be selected at random.

7. Performance

Preparing the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020-21

7.1 It was agreed that the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services will prepare the Accountability Report and Performance Report respectively for presentation to the May 2021 Board meeting.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

7.2 It was agreed that the outcome-based performance scorecards should be reported in the annual report, as far as possible.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

Preparing the Business Plan for 2021-22

7.3 A first draft of the Business Plan for 2021-22 has been circulated for comment by Directors and discussion with SMT members. A revised draft will be presented for discussion at the next formal SLT meeting.

Action: Directors

7.4 The draft Business Plan will also be discussed at the May SMT meeting before presentation to the next Board meeting.

Action: Chief Executive/Directors

8. Finance Matters

Preparing the budget for 2021-22

8.1 With funding confirmed for 2021-22, the budget can be prepared for Board approval. It was noted that much of the additional funding has been provided to support economic recovery and this needs to be reflected in expenditure plans. Directors were asked to consider the priorities for filling vacant posts, both permanent and temporary. It was noted that, while the budget baseline remains unchanged, savings from relocation to James House will allow some posts to be filled on a permanent basis.

Action: Directors

9. Corporate Risk Register

Preparing the Risk Register for 2021-22

9.1 The Chief Executive reported that, following discussion with the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), it was agreed to postpone the annual risk workshop until new Board members have been fully inducted. The workshop will also be used to brief new Board members on the Agency's approach to risk and risk management in general.

Action: Chief Executive

9.2 As this workshop is likely to be after the June 2021 ARAC meeting, the Chief Executive and ARAC Chair agreed that the current Risk Register should be carried forward and updated. A first draft of this will be prepared for SLT approval before submission to the ARAC.

Action: Director Corporate Services

10. Any Other Business

10.1 No other business.

11. Date of Next Meetings

11.1 The next formal SLT meeting will be on 4 May 2021 at 10.00 am, by videoconference.

Action: Secretary