

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM HELD AT 10.00am
ON 19 OCTOBER 2021 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Present:	Don Leeson	Chief Executive (Chair)
	Paul Lowe	Director of Corporate Services
	Mark McAllister	Director of Employment Relations Services
	Patricia Coulter	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
	Paul Herink	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
	Fionn Davey	NIPSA Branch 180 Chair
	Alison Wolfe	Minute Secretary

Apologies: None

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

As this was the last formal meeting for Patricia Coulter and Paul Herink under the 'Give SLT a Go' initiative, the Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to them for their contribution. Angela Bryans and Patrick McAuley will join SLT at the beginning of November for three months. The Chief Executive will hold 1:1 meetings with Patricia and Paul to seek their feedback about the learning experience.

1. Minutes from the Senior Leadership Team meeting held on 21 September 2021

1.1 The minutes of the meeting (paper SLT 01-10/21) held on 21 September 2021 were agreed for publication on the Agency's website subject to the following amendments:-

- + Add Don Leeson to Apologies; and,
- + Spell out any acronyms.

Action: Secretary

2. Actions arising from the previous minutes

2.1 The Director of Employment Relations Services reported that there were 92 attendees at the re-run of World Menopause Day seminar. There was also excellent press coverage, including an interview with the Equality Commission's Chief Commissioner (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.2 The Agency is involved in other high profile work, including guidance on vaccinations, hybrid working and domestic violence. It was noted that the guidance on domestic violence is being developed jointly with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions; other partner organisations have been unable to commit resources to the project at this time (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.3 A soft launch of the new document toolkit (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers) has taken place. Helen Smyth is showcasing the toolkit to teams within the Agency. Consideration to be given to a presentation on the toolkit at the December 2021 Board meeting.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.4 A flyer explaining the role of the Economic Development Team in supporting businesses here has been published (paragraph 2.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A local council recirculated the flyer on Twitter.

2.5 The Board has decided to postpone consideration of the future of the Independent Appeals Service until advice can be sought on a constitutional matter. A paper on this will be brought to a future Board meeting (paragraph 2.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). In the meantime, the hiatus is allowing the Chief Executive and Director of Employment Relations Services to continue to meet stakeholders to discuss possible outcomes of the review.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.6 The Director of Corporate Services reported that the James House Transition Working Group continues to seek clarification regarding a possible rent increase at the end of the five-year licence agreement (paragraph 2.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.7 Early Conciliation (EC) evaluation questionnaires have been finalised (paragraph 2.10 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.8 The Agency's Practical Guide to Hybrid Working was launched on 6 October (paragraph 2.12 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Feedback has been positive, especially via social media.

2.9 Following discussion at the recent Board meeting, the Director of Employment Relations Services has drafted a briefing paper setting out the Agency's functions as set out in the founding legislation (paragraph 2.13 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The draft paper has been circulated to SLT for comment and will be brought to the November 2021 Board meeting.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

2.10 A presentation on hybrid working was given to the Governance Institute of Ireland (paragraph 3.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.11 Input is required from the IT Manager to a number of queries raised by DfE on the business case for IS Managed Services (paragraph 4.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.12 The action plan drafted by HR in response to the Healthy Place to Work report, along with the Learning & Development Plan for 2021-22 to be discussed at SLT on 26 October (paragraph 5.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Papers to re-issue to SLT.

Action: Secretary

2.13 Changes to legislation in Great Britain to address EC administration problems were flagged up at the EC Project Board meeting with DfE on 7 October (paragraph 6.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

3. Chief Executive's Update

3.1 The Chief Executive reported on the meeting the Chair and he had with a senior DfE official. This highlighted the bleak financial outlook for 2022-23. However, it is anticipated that the Agency's baseline budget would be protected. The Agency had used the meeting to explain the difficulties having to rely on in-year funding was causing in terms of recruiting permanent staff.

3.2 The Chief Executive is finalising the agenda for the Agency's employment relations conference in February 2022.

Action: Chief Executive

3.3 A job description for secretariat support for the Roundtable is being progressed. It is anticipated that support will be provided by inwards secondees from Roundtable member organisations. The appointee will assist with the development of the Employment Relations Model for Northern Ireland and arrangements for the conference. Chief Executive to circulate the job description for comments.

Action: Chief Executive

4. Directors' Updates

4.1 The Directors provided updates on current activities.

- 4.2 It was noted that Workplace Information Service calls to date are currently lower than the previous two years, but the number of jurisdictions covered by calls is higher, indicating greater complexity and time per call.
- 4.3 It was noted that the close-out meeting for the internal audit of corporate governance is scheduled for later today.
- 4.4 Accommodation project meetings are being organised. The Project Manager is finalising the Project Initiation Document for SLT approval.
- 4.5 Pre-employment checks are being carried out on three successful candidates for Administrative Officer vacancies.
- 4.6 SLT noted that the HR team have been nominated for the Inspire Workplace Wellbeing award; the ceremony is due to take place on 20 October 2021. The SLT wished the team well.
- 4.7 The Business Intelligence Strategy will be discussed by the Board on 21 October 2021. The Strategy will help inform the Agency's approach to service delivery and business operations.
- 4.8 Publications Scheme and Retention Policy have been revised for SLT sign-off.
Action: Director of Corporate Services
- 4.9 The Knowledge Manager is putting in place a new process to manage subscriptions and renewals to ensure value for money.
Action: Director of Corporate Services
- 4.10 The Knowledge Manager reported on attendance at the inaugural meeting of the new CIPD policy forum. Consideration to be given to the Agency becoming involved as an observer.
Action: Director of Corporate Services/Knowledge Manager
- 4.11 The IT Manager reported that CMRS and web portal have been deployed onto the Agency's test environment. Preliminary checks are being made before user acceptance testing.
Action: IT Manager
- 4.12 A business case for temporary renewal of CMRS support has been issued for SLT approval.
Action: Director of Corporate Services
- 4.13 It was agreed that the on-boarding workshops with IT Assist are a priority to ensure new arrangements are in place ahead of relocation to James House.
Action: IT Manager

4.14 The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of having the appropriate information available for the annual report, and requested an analysis of gaps in the outcomes scorecards and how these will be addressed.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

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 02-10/21).

Preparation for the next Board meeting

5.2 The key agenda items for the October 2021 Board meeting were noted (paper SLT 03-10/21).

5.3 It was noted that Patricia Coulter and Paul Herink will attend the October 2021 Board meeting as part of the 'Give SLT a go' initiative; Paul will also present the ICT Strategy paper. Mary O'Brien will join the meeting to present the Business Intelligence Strategy.

5.4 The Director of Corporate Services reported that he had provided feedback to the Communications Manager following the last Board meeting. The Communications Strategy will be presented to the November 2021 Board meeting. It is hoped that the Agency's media partner will be able to attend.

5.5 It was noted that DfE's Permanent Secretary plans to attend the November 2021 Board meeting.

6. People Matters

HR metrics

6.1 The SLT noted the HR Metrics (paper SLT 04-10/21).

7. Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 30 September 2021

7.1 The SLT noted the Business Plan Performance Report (paper SLT 05-10/21).

8. Finance Matters – Management Accounts for the period ended 30 September 2021

8.1 Discussed at paragraph 3.1 above.

9. Corporate Risk Register

9.1 The SLT noted the Corporate Risk Register (paper SLT 07-10/21).

10. Strategy Papers - Data (Business Intelligence & ICT)

10.1 The Business Intelligence (paper SLT 08-10/21) and ICT Strategy (paper SLT 09-10/21) papers were noted.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The SLT held a detailed discussion on a staged transition to hybrid working arrangements for the Agency to inform wider SMT discussions.

11.2 Plans to formalise current building access arrangements for staff were noted, with G4S to restart opening/closing Head Office on a daily basis from 18 October 2021.

11.3 With effect from November 2021, the number of staff allowed into Head Office will be increased. This is to allow staff to perform essential business that cannot be carried out at home, including preparation for relocation to James House. Appropriate mitigations are set out in a revised risk assessment, which include staff being encouraged and trusted to take a lateral flow test before coming in to the office.

11.4 Following relocation, and when the public health situation allows, a hybrid working trial to support hybrid service delivery would be advisable. However, it was agreed that expectations regarding the minimum amount of time staff should spend in the office would be helpful to encourage new working patterns to emerge and support team dynamics and communications. To this end, it was agreed that team meetings should be held in-person, at least for the duration of the trial.

11.5 Hybrid working arrangements would need to be business-specific. The HR Team is preparing a template for senior managers to consider how they would manage hybrid working within their team.

11.6 Hybrid working will be the main focus of the next SMT meeting

Action: Chief Executive

12. Date of Next Meeting

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

Action: Secretary