

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM HELD AT 9.30am
ON 18 JANUARY 2022 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Present:

Don Leeson	Chief Executive (Chair)
Paul Lowe	Director of Corporate Services
Mark McAllister	Director of Employment Relations Services
Angela Bryans	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
Patrick McAuley	Employment Relations Manager (ERM)
Fionn Davey	NIPSA Branch 180 Chair
Pamela Robinson	EOII Business Support Team
Alison Wolfe	Minute Secretary

Apologies: None

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

Pamela Robinson, who takes over from Alison Wolfe as Executive Assistant in April 2022, was welcomed to her first SLT meeting.

As this was the last formal meeting for Angela Bryans and Patrick McAuley under the 'Give SLT a Go' initiative, the Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to them for their contribution. Elaine Clarke and Mary O'Brien will join SLT at the beginning of February 2022 for three months. The Chief Executive will meet Angela and Patrick to seek their feedback on the effectiveness of the initiative.

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

- 1.1 The minutes of the meeting (paper SLT 01-01/22) held on 16 November 2021 were agreed for publication on the Agency's website.

Action: Secretary

2. Actions arising from the previous minutes

- 2.1 The Chief Executive reported that the scheduled meeting with NIPSA to discuss the future of the Independent Appeals Service did not go ahead because of the absence of a senior official (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). This will be rescheduled.

Action: Chief Executive

- 2.2 The action plan developed by HR in response to the Healthy Place to Work report was shared with staff (paragraph 2.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.3 The Chief Executive reported that the job description for support for the Roundtable was agreed with member organisations (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). However, recruitment to the role has been placed on hold pending confirmation of the Agency's budget for 2022-23.

Action: Chief Executive

- 2.4 The Chief Executive will be meeting with his counterparts in Acas and WRC on 9 February 2022 to review the International Agencies virtual conference, which took place on 2 December 2021 (paragraph 3.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive

- 2.5 SLT members reported that staff found the first 'town hall' meeting worthwhile (paragraph 3.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). It was agreed to hold a second meeting in March, prior to relocation to James House. The frequency of these meetings, and how they dovetail with other communications activities, will be considered as part of a new Internal Communications Framework.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 2.6 The Chief Executive and Staff Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Champion are preparing the Agency's submission for the Diversity Mark Bronze Award (paragraph 3.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive

- 2.7 Angela Bryans reported that she met with the Agency's Dignity at Work advisers (paragraph 3.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers) to seek comments on amendments to the Dignity at Work policy. This will then be shared with the Trade Union Side. Meetings are planned with senior managers to discuss incorporating those aspects of operational guidelines dealing with aggressive or abusive callers into the policy.

Action: HR Team

- 2.8 The internal audit report on corporate governance arrangements was approved at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting on 13 December 2021 (paragraph 3.8 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

- 2.9 The Chief Executive will be meeting his counterpart at the Equality Commission on 20 January to discuss the agenda for the joint Board meeting on 2 March 2022 (paragraph 3.10 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Chief Executive

2.10 To address the increase in collective conciliations, arrangements are progressing to provide in-house training for ERM^s without collective conciliation experience in February/March 2022 (paragraph 4.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Ideally, this will replicate the approach adopted by Acas trainers and use actors for role-plays. The procurement implications of engaging the same actors used by Acas need to be considered.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

2.11 The Accommodation Project Initiation Document (PID) was approved by SLT on 11 January (paragraph 4.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). In light of the current public health situation, SLT agreed to delay implementing the updated risk assessment, which increases the number of staff allowed into Head Office, until February 2022.

2.12 The Director of Employment Relations Services reported that he is liaising with DfE officials to update the Agency's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (paragraph 4.6 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Design changes to the cover to be discussed with the Secretary and Communications Manager.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services/Secretary

2.13 Disability awareness training will be arranged for staff when the public health situation allows (paragraph 5.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Secretary

2.14 The Chief Executive reported that he had received legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office regarding a Board constitutional matter (paragraph 7.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). A corporate governance expert has been commissioned to provide further advice. A paper on this matter will be presented to the January 2022 Board meeting.

Action: Chief Executive

2.15 It was agreed that, as part of the transformation programme, it will be important to ensure that all staff are equipped with leadership skills. Directors agreed to encourage staff, particularly those in junior grades, to participate in the Leadership Development Programme (para 8.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

Action: Directors

2.16 The Board paper on the Statutory Role of the Labour Relations Agency to be shared with staff (paragraph 10.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers) for information.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

- 2.17 The proposed ‘elevator pitch’ will be discussed at the stakeholder mapping session with the Agency’s media partner on 18 January 2022 (paragraph 11.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers)

3. Chief Executive’s Update

- 3.1 The Chief Executive and Director of Employment Relations Services will be meeting representatives from the Careers Service to discuss ways of providing information to young people about employment rights.

Action: Chief Executive

- 3.2 The SMT meeting on 26 January will focus on key priorities for 2022-23, which will then be presented to the Board’s planning workshop in February 2022. ERM will be invited to the Board meeting to present the key priorities.

Action: Chief Executive/Secretary

4. Directors’ Updates

- 4.1 The Directors provided updates on current activities.

- 4.2 Plans to be progressed for a launch of the new online document toolkit.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

- 4.3 It was agreed to offer dates for in-person independent appeal hearings from February 2022 and to schedule all 55 outstanding appeals throughout 2022.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

- 4.4 The Director of Corporate Services reported that arrangements for the new CMRS support contract are being put in place.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 4.5 The Director of Corporate Services will be reviewing the business case for IT Assist in light of the decision to postpone on-boarding until CMRS integration issues have been resolved. The business case will be resubmitted to DfE.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 4.6 The Knowledge Manager is examining ways to address difficulties in Early Conciliation procedures within the Business Support Team.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 4.7 The Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services to discuss the internal audit of Information Management, which has been delayed by staff absence.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

- 4.8 Promotion of Hybrid Working Guidance to commence in February 2022 to coincide with anticipated changes to Executive guidance on working from home.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

- 4.9 A proposal will be made to the next Board meeting that the Agency does not invoke the break clause for the Regional Office, which is available in June 2022.

- 4.10 It was noted that Louise Crilly will be resigning from the Board at the end of January 2022. A replacement Board contact for raising concerns will be required.

Action: Chief Executive

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 02-01/22).

- 5.2 Engagement with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) will be progressed.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 5.3 The Board approved the recommendation to postpone the Agency's employment relations conference until June 2022. The Chief Executive reported that one keynote speaker is unavailable in June and asked for suggestions for alternatives

Action: SLT

Preparation for the next Board meeting

- 5.4 The key agenda items for the January 2022 Board meeting were noted (paper SLT 03-01/22).

Action: Secretary

6. People Matters

- 6.1 The SLT noted the HR Metrics (paper SLT 04-01/22).
- 6.2 HR will analyse questionnaire responses from Line Managers with a view to progressing the Hybrid Working Policy. Policy to be finalised prior to relocation.

Action: HR

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

- 7.1 The SLT noted the Business Plan Performance Report (paper SLT 05-01/22).
- 7.2 Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 31 December 2021 will be updated for the January 2022 Board meeting. It will be necessary to carry some objectives forward to the 2022-23 year.

Action: Directors

8. Finance Matters – Management Accounts for the period ended 31 December 2021

- 8.1 The Director of Corporate Services presented the Management Accounts for the period ended 31 December 2021 (paper SLT 06-01/22).
- 8.2 A detailed forecasting exercise to inform expenditure to end March 2022 is underway. The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, IT Manager and Finance Officer to meet to discuss expenditure.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

9. Corporate Risk Register

- 9.1 The SLT noted the Corporate Risk Register (paper SLT 07-01/22).
- 9.2 It was agreed that the risks associated with the backlog of independent appeals will be highlighted to the Board.

Action: Chief Executive

- 9.3 A workshop with Audit and Risk Assurance Committee members is scheduled for 3 February 2022 to discuss the format of the Corporate Risk Register. The Chief Executive plans to prepare prototypes for Committee members' consideration.

Action: Chief Executive

10. Towards Exemplary – Process Review Terms of Reference and next steps

- 10.1 The SLT noted the paper on the (paper SLT 08-01/22), which will be discussed with TUS. A key priority is to secure external support for the review.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 SLT members received a demonstration of the Decision Time toolkit.

12. Date of Next Meeting

- 12.1 The next formal SLT meeting will be on 15 February 2022 at 10.00 am, by videoconference.

Action: Secretary