

**PPS Management Board**

**11.00am Wednesday 23 March 2022**

**Via videoconferencing**

**Members:** Stephen Herron (Chair)  
Michael Agnew  
Marianne O’Kane  
Glenn Houston  
David Best  
Peter Luney

**In Attendance:** Tom Murphy (Private Office)  
Claire Harrison (Comms)  
Jo Anne Quinn (Finance) Item 10  
Head of RMT (RMT) Item 11  
DP Finance (NWW) Item 4

**Secretariat:** Policy and Information Unit

**Day One**

**1. Apologies.**

None.

**2. Welcome.**

Mr Herron welcomed members to the March 2022 Management Board and welcomed Mr Luney to his first meeting.

**3. Declaration of Board Members’ Interests.**

Mr Houston advised that RQAI is listed as a Core Participant in the Public Inquiry into Muckamore Abbey Hospital, and he may be called to give evidence.

#### **4. New Ways of Working**

The DP Finance provided an update of the current position on the roll out of 'New Ways of Working'.

Members reviewed the Service Mapping Template and agreed all the issues are now captured. It is envisaged that the Pilot will assist in highlighting and informing solutions to further issues and concerns that arise.

Ms Harrison provided an overview of the updated Operating Principles, Mr Houston suggested that some reordering of the information would be appropriate to place information about workstyle agreements to the fore.

Mr Luney highlighted that the challenge will be in establishing the implementation arrangements and reviewing same. There is a requirement for consistency and to ensure remote working arrangements demonstrate effectiveness. Mr Best also highlighted the need to have confidence that performance levels are being met.

Ms O'Kane noted that her residual concern related less visible inefficiencies, such as staff having to come into the office to access materials or services which would otherwise be readily available in the office or inefficiency which would give rise to delay. Workstyle agreements will be revisited after six months and amended if they are not delivering business needs.

Mr Luney also highlighted the potential impact on retention and recruitment of staff in certain roles, however it is acknowledged this will be a NICS wide issue.

Mr Herron expressed his gratitude to all involved in the project for the work completed to date.

Subject to a few minor amendments the Board is content to sign off on the Operating Principles. The Service Mapping templates, and Communication strategy were also agreed. Approval was also given for all documents to be shared for wider consultation.

#### **5. Management Board Minutes.**

The previous minutes were agreed.

#### **6. Actions from the Management Board Meeting of 23 February 2022.**

***AP1-22/23 Mr Agnew to consult with PIU and SIT on establishing a DV Working Group tasked with conducting thematic Quality Assurance of the new Domestic Violence offence.***

Ongoing - Mr Agnew has held discussions with PIU and SIT on identifying issues with the new offence. ICT are reporting twice weekly on the volume of cases received. PSNI have also proposed their own Gatekeeper arrangements and have put in place mechanisms to capture issues.

***AP2-22/23 Ms Quinn to include the value of Direct Award Contracts.***

Closed – Finance Report amended accordingly.

***AP3-22-23 Ms Quinn to review options for cost reductions following end of Quarter one if outcome of June Monitoring round not favourable.***

Ongoing – An options paper will be tabled at the next SMG and will then be presented to the April Management Board.

**7. Reports from Management Board Committee.**

**Senior Management Group 14 March 2022.**

Members reviewed and noted the matters discussed and actions arising from the Senior Management Group meeting of 14 March 2022.

Updates were provided on training and members noted an action plan for legal induction has been drafted. Mr Houston queried the handling of the ‘written out’ cases that cannot be progressed. Ms O’Kane advised that discussions were ongoing to have these cases reviewed. It had also been agreed to exclude these cases from the 180-day report to ensure more accurate reporting of timeliness performance.

**People and Resources Committee – 9 March 2022**

Members discussed the minutes and actions arising from the People and Resources Committee meeting of 9 March 2022. It was noted the suspension of elective transfers across the NICS is to be reviewed.

**Performance and Delivery Committee – 7 March 2022**

Ms O’Kane updated members on matters discussed at the Performance and Delivery Committee of 7 March 2022.

Ms O’Kane outlined the number of cases cleared in SCU has increased over the previous three months, however this is not keeping pace with the volume of new cases received into the Unit. An SPP with previous experience of working in SCU has been identified and plans are underway to reallocate this resource to the team.

The BCS Interim report is recommending additional resources for the Unit, however there is a lack of funding to support the resource. Mr McQuillan is

meeting with Finance and Statistics and Research to discuss and gather information to draft a business case for additional resources. Engagement is also ongoing with PSNI to inform a joint funding bid to tackle sexual offending and DV cases, particularly to support the Strategy to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls.

Mr Best queried the figures for older summary cases and whether there has been a focus on indictable cases. Ms O’Kane highlighted progress has been made in reducing the number of cases without a decision, with marginal increase in cases over 500 days. There is a need to maintain focus and encourage a practice of prioritising older cases, and as a result, it is intended to amend SPP PPAs for 2022/23 to incorporate regular reviews with PPS of the older cases appearing on the 365+ list.

Ms O’Kane advised that a request to review PP directing targets has been flagged. Feedback from prosecutors has indicated there is an increasing volume of cases, particularly DV cases, with significant amounts of video evidence which is impacting on the time taken to make decisions and is not reflected in the targets. It was agreed that any adjustment to the targets should be deferred while DV processes are still bedding in.

#### **Policy and Quality Committee – 10 March 2022.**

Mr Agnew advised that the Online Safety Bill is due to be introduced at Westminster, which will include new communications offences. PPS have been provided with a copy of the Bill via the Department of Justice and have raised queries regarding the applicability of the offences in Northern Ireland, and whether the new offences replace existing provisions under the Communications Act.

He added that new Guidelines for Prosecuting Cases involving Electronic Communications will be published by the PPS on 31 March. This is in response to a recommendation from Judge Marrinan’s Hate Crime Review. The Guidelines will be updated in the event that new legislation is introduced.

Discussions were held regarding options on the practice of marking disclosure schedules, members noted that the agreed appropriate balance was to try to progress work to ease the issues around the tasks whilst retaining the requirement to mark schedules.

Mr Best queried whether there were opportunities to develop further links and share training resources with CPS. Mr Agnew advised that PIU had engaged with CPS regarding online training in respect of DV cases. The CPS resources were helpful and of high quality, and it was agreed to adopt a blended approach, incorporating some of this material with locally developed material.

## **8. Strategic Improvement Board – 24 February 2022**

Mr Agnew updated members on the actions and matters discussed at the Strategic Improvement Board meeting held on 24 February 2022. Among matters discussed were Digital Evidence Sharing and it was noted that there are several issues that need to be addressed as progress is made towards roll out of phases two and three. Members discussed the prioritisation of projects and noted that these are reviewed on an ongoing basis, however the ability to progress is often determined by ICT capacity.

## **9. Performance Summary.**

### **Monthly Performance Summary February 2022**

Mr Agnew provided an overview of the performance as of February 2022. Comparing the current figures with the three-year average, between 2017/2018 and 2019/20, overall caseloads have decreased by 8%. There was a marginal decrease in the volume of files received in CW1-4 with a 9% decrease in summary CW 5-8 files, however a 25-30% increase in DV cases is noted.

There has been an 8% decrease in the overall work queue in comparison to the February 2020 baseline measure. There is also a 40% increase in files allocated to prosecutors, with B&E having a significantly higher allocation (87%) in comparison to the baseline. Overall, there is a 27% increase in caseload awaiting a decision, with B&E again having the highest increase.

The number of decisions issued during the financial year decreased from the corresponding 3-year baseline. Indictable decisions have increased by 20% on the baseline, however the volume of other decisions issued has decreased. SPP decisions per day is higher than the 2019/20 baseline, as is the proportion of days spent on casework. Likewise, PP decisions issued, and the days spent on casework, have exceeded the 2019/20 baseline.

Mr Agnew advised that reporting of DIRs/PDIRs is currently based on figures for the volume issued, however it is intended to have statistics on the percentage of cases they are reported on.

Members discussed figures for time spent on casework and noted targets reflect the decisions per day, whilst percentage of time spent on casework is more of a benchmark than a target.

Mr Houston queried the number of coercive control cases received to date. Mr Agnew advised that numbers are relatively low. There is ongoing engagement with police in respect of these cases, and there has been close monitoring from

the outset to identify any practices where DV aggravators are applied incorrectly, with reporting twice weekly on issues captured. A detailed quality assurance plan has also been in place; however, it is too early to report findings.

Ms O'Kane added that matters have been discussed at the Working Together Board, senior police have been consulted about investigations, and there is recognition this is a different style of investigation and level of training required for operational officers.

## **10. Finance**

### **Finance Update January 2022.**

Members reviewed and discussed the key financial issues being managed by the Finance Team as of January 2022.

Ms Quinn advised that there is currently a resource underspend of approximately £820k and a capital underspend of £230k. It is anticipated that there will be an outturn favourable to budget, with a projected easement of £722k resource and £35k capital.

There is a cumulative underspend of £305 across admin and programme pay. Counsel fees are approximately £88k adverse to budget, with the projected counsel fee spend reduced by £400k to £5.6m.

Mr Houston commended Ms Quinn and the Finance Team for the effective stewardship of the financial resources and the good outcome in respect of year end accounts.

For the 2022/25 budget it is expected a flatline roll forward of the £35.2 baseline with no further allocation against the bids. Pressures have been highlighted to Supply and the intention will be to submit bids for the shortfall at the earliest opportunity.

An options paper will be presented to SMG detailing the implications and considerations in the event that, at the end of the first quarter of the 2022/23 financial year, no additional funding were to be provided above the current budget position for that year.

Ms Quinn advised of a recent meeting with NIAO as part of ongoing engagement over the 2021/22 interim and year end accounts, and reported no issues were raised with the interim accounts. Members noted that a new Audit lead has been appointed.

Mr Luney queried whether there was a risk to the budget should the Executive not return. Ms Quinn advised that the initial allocation for quarter one will be in place and covid budgets will be allocated, the tipping point may be with the lack

of recovery allocation. There is a £2.1m bid for recovery which includes an allocation for counsel fees.

## **11. People**

### **RMT Update March 2022**

Members reviewed and noted the RMT update for March 2022, including the latest position on staffing levels, recruitment, training, health and wellbeing.

The Head of RMT highlighted the capacity figures and advised that the current resourcing levels are attributed to recovery. Members were also advised of issues with the security clearance for staff at the AA grade which is having an impact on the ability to fill vacancies.

The Head of RMT advised that the IIP recommendations, along with the People Survey findings, will be taken forward by PRC and will be incorporated into the strands of the People Plan.

### **NICS HR Summary Report March 2022**

Members reviewed and discussed the NICS HR March report.

The Head of RMT provided an overview of the figures and compliance targets for absence management. It is noted that there are issues with managers not completing return to work interviews.

Mr Houston highlighted the figures for long term sickness absences and the importance of retaining a focus on these and ensuring steps are being taken to manage these absences in accordance with the sickness absence policy.

### **BCS Review**

The Head of RMT advised that there has been no update or contact from BCS, causing further delay in the final report and recommendations. Enquiries have been made with CPS to identify potential contacts with a view to ascertaining their processes and procedure for completing reviews.

## **12. Governance Issues.**

### **Corporate Risk Register 2021/22.**

Members reviewed and discussed the 2021/22 Risk Register. Mr Houston noted that several risks have remained at the same rating following mitigations and proposed an amendment to the wording of the Risk 4.

### **Draft Corporate Risks Register 2022-23**

Members discussed the 2022/23 draft Risk Register and noted the planned actions/ mitigations and status and rating of all the risks. Mr Best highlighted the likelihood rating for Risk 9 and queried whether this rating is low. It was agreed that both ARC and SMG would review the ratings of the Risk.

### **13. AOB.**

#### **Business Case Perspex Screens.**

Members discussed the need, benefits, and costs associated with the installation of Perspex screens and accordingly approved the business case.

### **14. Papers for noting.**

#### **Communication Update.**

Ms Harrison provided an overview of the key communication activities including media queries, stakeholder engagement, the Digital Strategy, intranet and internal communications.

#### **Communication Planner.**

The Board Members discussed and reviewed the communications planner and update.

### **15. Next Meeting.**

Video Conferencing 26 April 2022 at 10.00am.

**Summary of Action Points arising from Management Board.**

**Meeting of 23 March 2022**



--	--

**Action Points carried over from previous meetings.**

<b><i>AP1-22/23</i></b>	<b><i>Mr Agnew to consult with PIU and SIT on establishing a DV Working Group tasked with conducting thematic Quality assurance of the new Domestic Violence offence.</i></b>
<b><i>AP3-22-23</i></b>	<b><i>Ms Quinn to review options for cost reductions following end of Quarter one if outcome of June Monitoring round not favourable.</i></b>