

PPS Management Board

10.00am Wednesday 28 June 2023

Belfast Chambers

Members: Stephen Herron
Michael Agnew
Marianne O’Kane
David Best
Glenn Houston
Peter Luney
JoAnne Quinn

In Attendance: Tom Murphy (Private Office)
Claire Harrison (Comms)
BCS Principal Consultant Item 2
BCS Senior Consultant Item 2
BCS Consultant Item 2

Secretariat: Policy and Information Unit

1. Welcome.

Mr Herron welcomed members and the consultants from BCS to the June 2023 Management Board.

2. PPS Board Effectiveness Presentation

The BCS Principal Consultant outlined the Terms of Reference of the review into the effectiveness of the Board. This will include an assessment of how the Board currently assesses its performance and an action plan to enhance performance.

The BCS Senior Consultant provided an overview of the scope and approach of the review which will encompass themes pertinent to the effectiveness of the Board based on Cabinet Office best practice and NI Audit Office Board Effectiveness Good Practice Guide 2022. Members noted the consultation plan and agreed that stakeholders should be advised of this approach and provided with the presentation slides for information.

AP05-23/24 Peter Luney to inform stakeholders that BCS will be consulting and provide the presentation slides for their information.

The review will commence in June 2023 and a presentation of the findings will be made to the September Board meeting.

3. Apologies

None.

4. Declaration of Board Members' Interests

None.

5. Management Board Minutes.

The previous minutes were agreed.

6. Actions from the Management Board Meeting of May 2023

AP 02-23/24 Mr Luney to schedule a follow up planning day with the ADs and Management Board.

Closed. Follow up planning day will be scheduled for the Autumn.

AP 03-23/24 Mr Luney to invite NICSHR to the Board for an update in the Autumn.

Closed. NICSHR will attend the September Board Meeting.

AP 04-23/24 Mr Luney to include reporting on timescales of outstanding reviews of No Prosecution decisions.

Closed. A Report will be provided to SMG quarterly and a summary will be included in the IMT quarterly report to MB.

7. Reports from Management Board Committees.

Senior Management Group 19 June 2023.

Mr Agnew provided an overview of the matters discussed at the Senior Management Group Meeting of 19 June 2023.

Ms O'Kane provided an update on the performance of SCU, reporting that the significant increase in productivity approaching the financial year end has levelled off however there continues to be positive steady progress. It is anticipated that high levels of summer leave will impact performance and may result in work queues increasing. The current level of resourcing of the Unit will be re-considered by the Board in September 2023.

Mr Houston highlighted the increase in new files failing the gateway checks. Ms O'Kane advised that this increase is being closely monitored, but having spoken with the AD of SCU, there are no immediate concerns and the numbers of files involved remain small. Mr Best queried matters that are detailed in the SCU

Statement of Assurance reflecting concerns about new areas of business now falling within the remit of SCU. Ms O’Kane noted that there are differing views on this, however it is considered that certain of the responsibilities do fall within the remit of SCU, whereas other areas of business could properly be dealt with outside the Unit.

Mr Houston queried the coordination of resourcing plans and whether backfill is required for vacancies arising from the SPP competition. Mr Luney reported that they had explored the possibility of running all schemes in parallel, however this proved difficult for NICSHR. It has now been agreed to proceed with the PP competition and whilst there are no immediate vacancies at the SPP grade, contingency planning is required to future proof and cover vacancies brought about by retirements and other changes.

Members were briefed on the options available to fill accountancy vacancies, with consideration being given to recruitment of part qualified finance staff. A response has been received to the Director’s letter to Neil Gibson about the embargo in general service vacancies, noting our concerns and advising that that they will continue to work with us.

Mr Houston highlighted the figure for the number of cases in Case Prep over thirty days and whether the current target was realistic. Mr Agnew reported that this was under consideration, with an overall evaluation of the section, previous merger of teams and processes and timeliness targets planned. Ms O’Kane advised that discussions have been held with Business Managers to try to reduce delay and to determine more meaningful performance metrics. Differences in practices have been identified and a more streamlined approach is required. Mr Agnew outlined that the processes need to be revised and timeliness will not be addressed until this takes place.

People and Resources Committee – 8 June 2023

Members reviewed and noted the minutes of the People and Resources Committee meeting of 8 June 2023.

Mr Luney outlined the high level of temporary arrangements still in place across the organisation. These arrangements present challenges for the organisation with reinvestment of staff training caused by staff turnover. It is also noted that there are several temporary staff that have been employed for an extensive period and have gained valuable expertise, however there is the risk that they may not be retained.

Members were updated on the Service Level Agreement with PRRT with some further clarification required before signing off, particularly in respect of capacity. Members discussed options available to address trauma resilience and support,

and it was noted that some measures may be challenging to implement, such as rotation. Members agreed that all options should be considered, and independent external advice should be sought to provide assurance that all reasonable measures have been taken to safeguard the wellbeing of staff.

Mr Best highlighted the reference in the minutes to morale issues with VWCU arising from recent media reporting and noted that support and resilience training has been provided to staff to assist in dealing with difficult callers.

Policy and Quality Committee 5 June 2023

Mr Agnew updated members on the matters discussed and action points arising from the Committee meeting of 5 June 2023.

A number of draft Staff Instructions were considered including Phase 2 of the RECS pilot, guidance for cases involving indecent images of children and the new offence of non-fatal strangulation legislation. Ms O’Kane advised of recent training seminars held to raise awareness of the new offence.

Mr Houston queried if data will be captured in respect of new offences and whether it will be possible to determine and measure the impact on workloads. Mr Agnew advised that there will be a specific offence, and this will be monitored in terms of volume and accuracy in reflecting the seriousness of the case. These offences will attract more significant sentences and will be dealt with in the Crown Court. Cases will be allocated to SPPs, and it is anticipated this could increase the caseload by several hundred cases / year.

Performance and Delivery Committee

The meeting was postponed until September due to operational pressures and no time critical business arising.

8. Strategic Improvement Board

Strategic Improvement Dashboard May 2023

Mr Agnew updated members on progress of the key projects. There are four live projects: namely Content Manager, RECS, No Prosecution letters and DEMS.

Members were advised of an issue with the No Prosecution letters. The new scheme requires police to record the details, including email addresses on the PIF, however PSNI have advised they cannot pilot changes to the SOC/PIF. This will require a manual workaround by PPS staff to check that the consent and details have been recorded. Discussions with ICT have identified a potential

solution; however, this requires an IT change and will need to be considered by the ICT Change Board.

Mr Luney advised that a review of the IT change list will be completed to ascertain best yields and a new list will be created. Resourcing and capacity to undertake this work continues to be a challenge. A number of options are being considered including the potential of a call off contract to do testing and develop specifications which would speed up changes.

Members noted that Content Manager project is currently behind schedule, with issues in resourcing a main factor in the delay. The rollout plans have been rescheduled, with plans being considered to commence implementation in the Private Office. Enquiries are being made regarding risks in the delay with the potential impact of the email retention rules. It is acknowledged that rollout to the entire structure by October 2023 is not realistically achievable.

Mr Houston queried the criticality of the function and whether delay is having a significant impact on business delivery. Mr Agnew advised this can be mitigated with the ability to reposition and access to libraries folders.

The RECs project delivery is ongoing with process maps between stakeholders agreed and a staff instruction to be issued and approved by PQC when IT changes are completed.

The DEMS project is scheduled to go live in September, however there may be delays arising from resourcing issues. Members discussed compliance issues and it was noted that CPS had similar issues with file quality. Further engagement will be held with police and a paper will be drafted for consideration detailing the benefits, notwithstanding the problems.

Mr Houston queried the varying degrees of urgency and impact of the other remaining projects. Mr Agnew advised that there is a process to consider and prioritise the remaining projects. It was agreed to provide the Board with more recent and detailed analysis for the other projects.

AP06-23/24 Mr Luney to provide more detail on the other projects.

9. Performance Summary.

Board members reviewed and discussed the Monthly Performance Summary, as of May 2023.

Mr Agnew outlined that the overall caseload awaiting a decision at the end of May had increased significantly since the May 2019 baseline. The number of decisions issued during the financial year to date was lower than the 3-year average baseline to May 2019.

Members were advised of pressures in CW categories 1-4 arising from a steady increase in the caseload over the past two years and resourcing issues at the SPP grade. Overtime has assisted in reducing the volume of summary cases. Members also noted that SPP decisions per casework day had increased, however the figure for PPs was slightly lower.

Mr Houston queried the volume of DV cases received, highlighting an increase of 52% in comparison to the equivalent period between 2017/18 and 2019/20. Ms O'Kane advised that increased focus on these offence types has impacted on the volume of files flagged by PSNI as DV motivated. However whilst file received are marked as DV, following a PPS review, the actual numbers are significantly less. The real increase is around 25%. Members were also advised that further overtime has been approved for PPs to target DV cases and SPPs to focus on 500+ day cases.

There had been a steady decrease in the volume of files in Case Preparation, however this appears to be levelling off in recent months and it was noted that approximately 73% of the cases have been in the section for more than 30 days.

10. Finance Update

Executive Summary

Members reviewed and discussed the key financial issues being managed by the Finance Team as of 31 May 2023.

Ms Quinn outlined that to date there was cumulative overspend of £70k across admin and programme costs. It is anticipated that there will be an outturn adverse to budget with a projected pressure of £910k, based on the assumptions around staffing levels, including that all existing vacancies will be filled within reasonable timeframes.

Members noted that a Monitoring Round is unlikely to take place until mid-Autumn. Whilst Supply is aware of our pressures, additional funding is not anticipated. However, there may be scope to submit bids for modernisation. Discussion ensued regarding recruitment to fill vacancies and the various options that should be explored to obtain the required resources.

11. People

NICS HR Summary Report June 2023

Members reviewed and discussed the June 2023 NICS HR Report, including the latest staffing position, vacancies and recruitment, employee relations, and performance management.

Mr Luney provided members with an overview of several people issues, including access to information on managing attendance and sickness levels.

12. Governance Issues.

Corporate Risk Register 2023/24

Members reviewed and discussed the 2023/24 Risk Register and noted the planned actions, mitigations, status, and rating of all risks. It was agreed that Risk 3, funding pressures, should be amended to reflect the latest budget position.

Members discussed Risk 11, staff welfare and resilience, and agreed that the wording should be amended. It was also considered that the current ratings are correct, however the impact should be adjusted to 8 to reflect the controls. Members discussed the various measures in place and potential further options including risk assessments and staff rotation. It was agreed to seek independent external assistance to review the measures in place and advise whether other steps could be taken.

ARC Update

Mr Houston updated members on the outcome of two recent internal audit reports, (Financial Management and Cyber Security) which had both received satisfactory outcomes, with priority two and priority three recommendations identified and accepted by management.

13. AOB

Criminal Justice Board

Mr Herron provided an overview of matters raised at the recent Criminal Justice Board (CJB). Members discussed the Options Paper presented in respect of Reducing Demand and noted there was further joint scoping required with the police. Mr Herron had requested that a further update should be provided to DOJ in early August 2023 in advance of the next CJB.

14. Communication Update.

Ms Harrison provided a verbal update on data and feedback from the recent staff engagement events.

Communication Planner.

The Board Members discussed and reviewed the Communications Planner and update.

15. Next Meeting.

The next Management Board will take place on the 15 September 2023 at 10.00 am in Belfast Chambers.

Summary of Action Points arising from Management Board.

Meeting of 28 June 2023

<i>AP05-23/24</i>	<i>Peter Luney to inform stakeholders that BCS will be consulting and provide the presentation slides for their information.</i>
<i>AP06-23/24</i>	<i>Mr Luney to provide more detail on the other projects.</i>

Action Points carried over from previous meetings.

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