

**PPS Management Board**

**10.00am Thursday 2 May 2024**

**Belfast Chambers**

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

**In Attendance:** Claire Harrison (Comms)

**Secretariat:** Policy and Information Unit

**1. Welcome.**

Mr Herron welcomed members to the May 2024 Management Board.

**2. Apologies**

None.

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

None.

**4. Management Board Minutes.**

The previous minutes were agreed.

**5. Actions from the Management Board Meeting of March 2024**

***AP 12-23/24. Mr Luney to circulate a copy of the Senior Management Leadership and Development Proposal.***

Closed. Proposal circulated to members.

**6. Reports from Management Board Committees.**

**Senior Management Group 24 April 2024.**

Mr Agnew updated members on the matters discussed at the Senior Management Group Meeting of 24 April 2024. Among the matters discussed were the quality assurance statistics and the Project Dashboard, and it was agreed to bring the action plan for future projects to the next meeting.

Ms O’Kane advised members that PA Consultancy have been commissioned to deliver training on enhanced communications for victims of sexual offences. This has been funded from a successful joint bid with the PSNI to the Victim of Crime fund.

### **People and Resources Committee – 11 April 2024**

Mr Luney provided an update of the matters discussed at the meeting of 11 April 2024.

Ms Quinn highlighted the requirement in some cases for approval of expenditure from Supply and the issue of having to obtain retrospective approvals and delegations. Members were reminded to ensure that all expenditure is flagged to facilitate appropriate monitoring and reporting.

Members noted positive progress made in the management of long-term sickness absences. Mr Luney provided an update on the end-to-end review of sickness absence with plans to streamline the processes and reduce delay.

Mr Houston queried the information included in the GDPR update, Mr Luney advised that the number of instances of concern are low and the Data Protection Officer will be asked to attend the next meeting to provide an update on the current monitoring.

### **Performance and Delivery Committee 22 April 2024**

Ms O’Kane updated members on matters discussed at the meeting of 22 April 2024.

Ms O’Kane highlighted the figures for unallocated casework and the increasing volume of cases and pressures across all areas and grades, particularly in Belfast and Eastern region. These are arising due to capacity issues and work pressures rather than an increase in files received. Members discussed the potential and noted the implications with sharing staff across regions to deal with the caseloads.

Mr Herron outlined the need for additional resources and highlighted that addressing the resourcing and capacity issues would stabilise performance in the long run.

Members discussed the options available and noted the limitations and short-term efficiencies gained from making overtime available to staff. The benefits that have been anticipated from the rollout of the No File Decision Pilot have not yet materialised. It was agreed that resourcing the organisation to required capacity should be taken forward as a priority. Miss O’Kane and Mr Luney will discuss plans with RMT to progress this matter.

Members noted that performance in the SCU remains stable with the existing resourcing allocation, and this has been further strengthened by the Gateway team. Ms O’Kane advised members that Mr McQuillan, the Assistant Director for SCU is leaving the department. The vacancy will be filled with a temporary expression of interest for initial six months thereafter a competition will be held in the Autumn to fill the post permanently. The Board passed on their thanks to Mr McQuillan and wished him well in his new post.

## **7. Strategic Improvement Board**

### **Strategic Improvement Dashboard April 2024**

Mr Agnew provided members with an overview of progress made in the key projects.

In respect of the No Files Decision Project, members were updated on a few issues that have arisen, including the application of the criteria and a lower uptake than anticipated. Legal Advice has been sought on the handling of cases where the suspects have been arrested /detained, which may increase the volume of cases that can be progressed by a NFD. Members noted the scope of the project is limited to the lower category cases.

The Pilot continues to be managed and monitored to ensure it is operating effectively and quality remains high. An interim evaluation was scheduled for the April 2024 however due to the lower than anticipated uptake in new file decisions, this has been extended to allow sufficient time for arrangements to properly bed in before the valuation commences. There are also plans to engage with stakeholders to obtain their input into the evaluation process. Mr Herron updated members on discussions held with the Victims Commissioner in which the needs of vulnerable victims and the reviews process were highlighted.

Members were given an update on the progress of the rollout of the Content Manager Project and noted that there are plans to have additional resourcing in place to assist with this project.

Referrals to the REC have now increased to the extent where some weeks are fully booked. Monitoring of the project is ongoing and evaluation of phase two is scheduled for September 2024.

Mr Luney advised that the electronic signatures project initiation phase has commenced with a target date of completion for September 2024. Work is ongoing to ensure that the processes meet the business needs and adhere to the relevant PPS policies and Magistrates Court Rules.

Members noted that a number of internal ICT changes have not progressed due to conflicting demands on the ICT team and contractors. Reviews are being conducted of several projects to gain an understanding of the business need and to establish whether changes are still required. Members also noted the detail of potential future projects.

The project to consider the potential to restructuring to a three-region model will be moved to the main project list. Scoping of the various issues is ongoing, with considerations of workloads, court venues, location of staff and the various interfaces in order to appraise options and develop an implementation plan.

## **8. Performance Summary.**

Members reviewed and discussed the Monthly Performance Summary, as of March 2024.

The work queue at the end of March 2024 has increased by 62% since March 2023. Overall caseload awaiting a decision at the end of March 2024 has increased by 18.8% since March 2023, with Belfast and Eastern having the highest increase of 25.8%. There has been a slight decrease in the number of decisions taken during the financial year. Members noted that in most areas the decisions per casework for both SPP and PPs exceeded the 2023/24 target.

Ms O'Kane advised that discussions and comparative work is ongoing with the Assistant Directors to reconcile figures and to determine the average casework output. Further interrogation of the data is required including examination of other tasks which are not actual decision making, however it is noted that there are limitations with the available data. A review of the capacity model will capture these issues and will consider other factors impacting outputs including the review of multimedia evidence. Mr Agnew also highlighted the relevance of a MOU and consideration of the gateway model.

Members were also briefed on plans to undertake advocacy monitoring to evaluate the quality of counsel performance in the Magistrates Court. The Counsel Fees Manager is taking forward a number of tasks to raise awareness of standards including holding inductions with some of the new counsel.

## **9. Finance Update**

### **Executive Summary**

Members reviewed and discussed the key financial issues as of March 2024.

Ms Quinn advised members that there are still a few figures pending before the year-end figures can be finalised, work is ongoing with provisions and the pay award. Figures have also been calculated and shared with IA and NIAO in respect of counsel fees accruals. Overall, the forecast is estimated an under spend of approximately £6/700k. Supply have been made aware of the surplus. There are several reasons for the underspend including the reclassification of counsel fees from accrual to provision. There is a recognition that the assumptions made on the pay award were made within a tight turnaround and therefore lacked extensive analysis for more accurate forecasting.

Ms Quinn updated members on the anticipated budget settlement for 2024/25. This anticipated settlement does not include the bid for modernisation and the Working Together Project. However, a submission will be made to the Transformation Fund with the expectation of a successful allocation. Members were also advised of a slight reduction in the Capital funding at block level, however PPS have been allocated their full capital ask of £701K for 2024-25.

Members noted that no allocations had been finalised, however, discussed the need to move forward with a more stabilised staffing model processes and structure. Previously, reliance on funding from in year bids had dictated the use of resources, particularly overtime and temporary staff, however the potential of a more favourable settlement would permit recruitment of staff and introduce stability into the model. Mr Herron emphasised the need to communicate with staff and noted that morale is low.

In respect of the year end Annual Report and Accounts, members were advised that the arrangements for the audit on the financial accounts have been agreed and included in the NIAO Audit Strategy for 2023-24 accounts. It is intended to have the annual report drafted by the end of May, and the accounts to be reviewed by the NI audit office in August. Members will be kept informed of the progress.

### **Annual Report & Accounts – Requirements of FReM.**

Ms Quinn outlined a few changes that have been requested with financial reporting, in particular the requirement to report on the issues negatively impacting on the business. Members discussed and agreed several matters of relevance that should be highlighted.

## **10. People**

### **NICSHR Summary Report April 2024**

Members noted the April report, including the latest staffing and recruitment, employee relations and performance management .

Mr Luney provided an update on progress to fill vacancies in both legal and specialist posts. Members noted the SPP competition is ongoing and there are considerations of other roles to assist with capacity.

## **11. Governance Issues.**

### **Corporate Risk Register 2023/24**

Mr Luney provided members with a verbal update on the 24/25 Risk Register. There are a range of risks being reviewed and carried forward from last year's register, including caseloads and staff well-being. Several new risks have been identified, namely legacy arrangements and associated funding, the modernisation project delivery and obligations in respect of victims and witnesses. The new Risk Register and Business Plan will be provided at the next Management Board meeting.

### **Complaints**

Members reviewed and noted the summary of complaints and reviews received for 2023/24.

### **ARC Update**

Members reviewed and noted the draft minutes for the ARC meeting of 13 March. 2024. Mr Houston updated members on the progress of the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24. One Audit is at the final stage of fieldwork and a satisfactory assurance has been received in respect of the audits of the Victim and Witness Care Unit and Workforce Planning. There were no losses or special payments incurred and no fraud or loss of assets to report. Members also noted progress to fill the current vacancy on the Committee.

Mr Houston advised members of the proposed internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

Members noted the following four areas have been proposed for audit: Attendance Management, Case Work Progression/Dip Sampling, Financial Management – Procurement and Contract Management, Creditors Payments, Gifts & Hospitality and the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

## **12. AOB**

### **Legacy Act**

Mr Herron provided an update on the Legacy Act, in particular the implications for prosecutions and inquests, noting the ongoing legal challenge. Members discussed the need to review resourcing for legacy matters and requirements for a PPS legacy unit to be established. Submissions have previously been included in the business case made by DOJ, and in the absence of any successful bids this it was agreed that it would be appropriate to consider alternative funding channels. Members noted that Mr Herron has recently written to key stakeholders setting out the potential impact to service delivery and highlighting the PPS funding requirements for this area of work.

## **13. Communication Planner.**

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

## **14. Next Meeting.**

The next Management Board will take place on 4 July at 10.00 am in Belfast Chambers.

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

**Meeting of 2 May 2024**

--	--

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

--	--