

**MINUTES OF THE 487th MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD
HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2023 AT 10.00AM AT THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY
HEAD OFFICE, JAMES HOUSE, 2-4 CROMAC AVENUE, BELFAST, BT7 2JA**

Present: Gordon Milligan (Chair)
Clare Duffield
Kevin McCabe
John Taylor
Lee Wilson
Sarah Havlin
Orla Sheils
Mark Spence
Libby Armstrong

In Attendance: Don Leeson Chief Executive
Mark McAllister Director of Employment Relations
Oliver Murray Executive Assistant

Apologies: Geraldine Alexander
Paul Lowe Director of Corporate Services
Virginia Aldana Boardroom Apprentice

This was hybrid meeting with some Board members attending via videoconference.

The Director of Corporate Services is currently on a leave of absence. In his place, the Chief Executive will be present the relevant sections.

Declarations of Interest: None

1. Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the new Board members; Elizabeth (Libby) Armstrong, Sarah Havlin, Orla Sheils and Mark Spence. The new Board members introduced themselves and were introduced to the current Board members.
- 1.2 The Chair thanked the current Board members for their diligence in carrying forward the Board's work with reduced membership for the last five months.
- 1.3 The Chair noted current staffing issues within the Agency relating to IT matters.
- 1.4 'Cost of Conflict' and 'Good Employment Practice' Research work with Warwick Uni noted. The draft report is now due with the SLT in early

October and the researcher(s) will attend the Board meeting on 26 October to present the final report for Board approval.

- 1.5 An update was given on the meeting held with Anna Perry and David Beggs of the Workplace Relations Commission in Dublin earlier this week.
- 1.6 Plans for the Agency's participation in the upcoming CIPD Annual Awards and Business Eye Awards were noted.
- 1.7 An update was given regarding a recent internal grievance raised within agency. Plans to amend recruitment selection and grievance policy were noted.

Action: Chief Executive

2. Horizon Scanning for Opportunities and Risks

- 2.1 The Board noted the Supreme Court decision regarding the Agnew case and an in-depth discussion was held regarding the ramifications for the Agency from a resource perspective.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

3. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting

- 3.1 Minutes of the Board meeting held on 23 August 2023 (paper BP01-09/23) were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting for publication on the Agency's website.

Action: Executive Assistant

4. Action Points from Previous Board Meetings

- 4.1 The Chief Executive presented the progress report on actions from previous Board meetings (paper BP02-09/23), which was noted by the Board.
- 4.2 An update on the planned Mediation event for 25 January 2024 was given. A meeting between the Agency and Mediation NI on 21 September 2023 confirmed a joint interest in progressing this event, in the context of the cost of workplace conflict research.
- 4.3 Ongoing plans for working with CIPD NI for a conference on flexible working was noted. A joint webinar with the CIPD NI Branch on the future of hybrid working has been scheduled for 16 October 2023, which Board members are welcome to attend.

- 4.4 The Draft terms of reference for a new forum, which will be created from the Employment Relations Roundtable and the Engagement Forum on Covid-19 have been prepared for consultation with stakeholders. These will be discussed initially with DfE at a meeting scheduled for 9 October 2023.
- 4.5 Plans were noted for the International Day of Disabled Persons panel event in partnership with Cedar foundation and Equality Commission. The event is planned for 4 December 2023, with possible panellists currently being approached.

5. Chief Executive's Report

- 5.1 The Chief Executive presented the report (paper BP03-09/23), which was noted by the Board.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive noted a meeting held with the Local Government Staff Commission on 4 October 2023 to discuss its response to the recommendations emanating from the Agency's Article 86 review of collective bargaining arrangements in the sector.
- 5.3 The Chief Executive gave an update on the recruitment for Agency's new apprenticeship programme, which has concluded with two appointments being made. Future recruitment plans for a number of other vacancies were also noted.
- 5.4 The Board recognised Lorraine Armstrong, who recently celebrated her 45th year working for the Agency. Lorraine's excellent work throughout her career was noted.

Action: Chief Executive

- 5.5 The Director of Employment Relations Services briefed the Board on the current caseload of collective conciliations.
- 5.6 The Director of Employment Relations Services noted plans to partner with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, to publish guidance aimed at preventing workplace sexual harassment. Women in Business has agreed to endorse the guidance; the Equality Commission is considering doing similar.
- 5.7 The Director of Employment Relations Services noted that CavanaghKelly have been hired as the Agency's new internal auditors. They will provide audit services for the next three years. An internal audit plan for 2023-24 is being agreed with Audit and Risk Assurance Committee members; a

three-year Strategic Internal Audit Plan will be considered at the December 2023 Committee meeting.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

6. Programme for Board Strategy Day – 25 October 2023

6.1 The Chief Executive presented the Programme for Board Strategy Day – 25 October 2023 (paper BP04-09/23), which was noted by the Board.

7. Finance and Personnel Committee – Report on Meeting held on 4 September 2023

7.1 In the absence of the Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee, the Chief Executive presented the Finance and Personnel Committee – Report on Meeting held on 4 September 2023 (paper BP05-09/23), which was noted by the Board.

8. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Report on Meeting held on 11 September 2023

8.1 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee presented the report on the meeting held on 11 September 2023 (paper BP06-09/23), which was noted by the Board.

8.2 Two new risks have been escalated by the Senior Leadership Team for inclusion on the Corporate Risk Register. These are in respect of: Regional Office accommodation continuation plans and Personal Data Security, following the experience of another public body.

9. Revised Conflicts of Interest Policy

9.1 The Revised Conflicts of Interest Policy (paper BP07-09/23) was noted by the Board.

9.2 The draft revised policy was reviewed at the last ARAC meeting and agreed for submission for Board approval.

9.3 A discussion was held on the definition of Conflicts of Interest, with the emphasis in the policy is on conflicts with “private interest” not professional interests. This is particularly relevant to us, given that a number of members engage with the Agency outside of their Board role.

9.4 An updated Register of Interests from the Board and SLT is to be posted on Agency’s website shortly.

Action: Executive Assistant

10. Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 31 August 2023

10.1 The Business Plan Performance Report for the period ended 31 August 2023 (paper BP08-09/23) was noted by the Board.

10.2 The Director of Employment Relations Services briefed the Board on a range of issues currently facing the Agency, as well as a basic rundown of the services that it provides.

Action: Director of Employment Relations Services

10.3 The Chief Executive gave an update on the Transformation Project. Project team meetings have commenced. The next steps will be the development of the PID and completion of DERS ERM training needs analysis/personal competency grid.

10.4 The Chief Executive noted that plans to amend the Agency's case management system (CMRS) are currently being explored to progress the recommended option, along with the availability of additional capital funding through DfE.

Action: Chief Executive

11. Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 August 2023

11.1 In the absence of The Director of Corporate Services, the Chief Executive presented the Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 August for 2023-24 (paper BP09-09/23), which were noted by the Board.

11.2 It was noted that all planned action is currently on schedule.

Action: Chief Executive

12. Any Other Business

12.1 There was no other business.

13. Date of Next Meeting

13.1 The next meeting of the Board will be the Board Strategy Day on 25 October 2023 at 9.00am in Malone House, Belfast.

13.2 The next official Board meeting will be held the following day on 26 October 2023 at 10.00am in James House. The agenda for the next meeting (paper BP10-09/23) was noted by the Board.

Action: Executive Assistant