

MINUTES OF THE 483<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD  
HELD ON 29 MARCH 2023 AT 10.00AM  
AT THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY HEAD OFFICE,  
JAMES HOUSE, 2-4 CROMAC AVENUE, BELFAST, BT7 2JA

**Present:** Gordon Milligan (Chair)  
Geraldine Alexander  
Deirdre Fitzpatrick  
Kevin McCabe  
Daire Murphy  
Jill Minne  
John Taylor  
Michelle McGinley  
Lee Wilson

**In Attendance:** Mark McAllister Acting Chief Executive  
Don Leeson Chief Executive  
Paul Lowe Director of Corporate Services  
Christine Magill Boardroom Apprentice  
Oliver Murray Executive Assistant

**Apologies:** Clare Duffield  
Jill Minne  
Christine Hagan

This was a hybrid meeting, with some Board members attending in person and others by videoconference.

**Declarations of Interest:** It was noted that sensitivities involved at agenda item 8 for **Geraldine**, where NIPSA is impacted by the Article 86 review of local government collective bargaining arrangements.

It was also noted the sensitivities involved at agenda item 9 for **Daire** and **Geraldine** as current users of the Independent Appeals Service, and **Clare** and **Kevin** as former users.

## 1. Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The Chair acknowledged the budget uncertainty the Board faced, as certain members appointments are due to end on 31 March 2023. The Board were thanked for their forbearance and efforts made by the Agency to press DfE for action regarding making appointments or granting extensions was noted. The Board were thanked for agreeing to stay on in event of extension.

1.2 **Michelle** was thanked for stepping in at the last minute to Chair the March Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting, following **Deirdre's** recent running accident.

1.3 Alison Wolf, former Executive Assistant, was congratulated for her BEM awarded for services to employment relations in Northern Ireland.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## 2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting

2.1 Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 26 January 2023 (Paper BP01-03/23) were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting for publication on the Agency's website.

2.2 Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 February 2023 (Paper BP02-03/23) were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting for publication on the Agency's website.

**Action: Executive Assistant**

## 3. Action Points from Previous Board Meetings

3.1 The Acting Chief Executive presented the progress report on actions from previous Board meetings (paper BP03-03/23), which was noted by the Board.

3.2 It was noted that **Julie Ann Donnelly** has accepted the role as Communications Manager to cover **Keelin Kelly's** maternity break.

3.3 It was noted that Standing Orders are to be updated to reflect revised in-camera arrangements.

## 4. Chief Executive's Report

4.1 The **Chief Executive** presented the report (paper BP04-03/23), which was noted by the Board.

4.2 It was noted that successfully recruited IT Manager has now withdrawn offer. Alternative arrangements are now being considered for providing additional capacity in this business-critical area, where the Agency seems to be unable to compete for suitably qualified staff on the basis of salary.

4.3 Work of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager **Claire Webb** and the Agency as a whole were both acknowledged as finalists in the Women in Business Awards for 'Advancing Diversity in the Workplace' in the individual and company categories respectively.

- 4.4 An update was given on collective conciliation workload at present. There are currently 10 'live' industrial disputes across a range of sectors. **Helen Smyth** thanked for hard work with recent dispute.
- 4.5 A discussion held on a range of issues regarding how to get work of Agency publicised. Comms and code of practice considered. Data protection issues
- 4.6 Work with Belfast Business Promise work noted. A business plan is being considered in line with the 10X strategy. The Agency will be represented at the launch event on 23 March 2023 and plan to sign-up to the charter as an 'early adopter' employer.
- 4.7 The Agency was represented at the INTO and NASUWT teachers' unions annual conferences on 10 and 11 March 2023 respectively. It was noted that the NASUWT conference passed a motion regarding the Agency's role in respect of independent appeals.
- 4.8 The Agency's Annual assessment for Customer Service Excellence Standard took place yesterday, with assessor recommending that current accreditation is retained. **Paddy Ann Moore** thanked for her work with this.
- 4.9 **Diane Edgington** thanked for work as Accommodation Manager in clearing out Gordon Street premises, which has now been vacated. Negotiations are now in place for dilapidation plans.

**Action: Chief Executive**

## **5. Reflections on the Employment Relations Conference held on 23 February 2023 and Next Steps**

- 5.1 February's Employment Relations Conference was noted as a success. The quality of speakers, workshops and professionally delivered content has lead to good feedback from attendees. A written evaluation report is being prepared and will be shared with Board members shortly.
- 5.2 The Staff involved with planning the event were thanked. Media from the day is due to be published shortly on the Agency's website.
- 5.3 It was noted that good relationships with speakers, material from presentations will also inspire the Agency's future strategic work.

## **6. Article 86 Review of Collective Bargaining Arrangements in Local Government – Emerging Findings**

- 6.1 Former Agency staff member, **Tommy Wright** joined the meeting to brief the Board on the emerging findings from the Article 86 review of local government collective bargaining arrangements – the review report will be presented to the June Board meeting.
- 6.2 A wide-ranging discussion took place regarding the current industrial landscape and the challenges that may be faced.
- 6.3 The Board thanked **Tommy** for his insights, feedback from stakeholders useful.

## **7. Review of the Independent Appeals Service – Legal Advice and Next Steps**

- 7.1 The Review of the Independent Appeals Service – Legal Advice and Next Steps (paper BP05-03/23) was approved by the Board.
- 7.2 A wide-ranging discussion was held on options for going forward and possible associated risks. The Board were asked to approve recommended next steps, which are to write to stakeholders to seek nominations for a working group to agree a governance framework for independent appeals, and request removing the Agency from the collective agreements when they are next reviewed.

## **8. Draft Business Plan for 2023-24**

- 8.1 The Draft Business Plan for 2023-24 (paper BP06 03/23) was approved by the Board.

**Action: Senior Leadership Team**

## **9. Finance and Personnel Committee – Report on Meeting held on 7 February 2023**

- 9.1 The Finance and Personnel Committee – Report on Meeting held on 7 February 2023 (paper BP07-03/23) was noted by the Board.
- 9.2 Minutes from Finance and Personnel Committee meeting to be amended to include **Lee**.

## **10. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Report on Meeting held on 6 March 2023**

- 10.1 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Report on Meeting held on 6 March 2023 (paper BP08-03/23) was noted by the Board.
- 10.2 Self-assessment of Committee was completed during in-camera session.

## **11. Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 28 February 2023**

11.1 The Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 28 February (paper BP09-03/23) was noted by the Board, with a more detailed report to follow in May/June's Board meeting.

## **12. Management Accounts for the Period Ended 28 February 2023**

12.1 The Management Accounts for the Period Ended 28 February report (paper BP10-03/23) was noted by the Board.

12.2 It was noted that this is the end of the financial year, and the initial audit of the Agency's expenditure has commenced. The draft accounts will be prepared during April, audited in May, and then presented to ARAC and the Board in June.

**Action: Director of Corporate Services**

## **13. Arrangements for Board Effectiveness Self-Assessment**

13.1 It was noted that in line with recommended practice, members will be invited to complete the annual Board Effectiveness Self-Assessment. Board members are asked to complete this, along with an updated register of interests and biographical details. The aggregated results will be considered at the next Board meeting.

**Action: Executive Assistant**

## **14. New Board Member Induction Arrangements**

14.1 The New Board Member Induction Arrangements (paper BP11-03/23) was noted by the Board.

14.2 It was noted that a rigorous process of induction that is currently in place, with very positive feedback noted.

## **15. Review of the Meeting**

15.1 Board members confirmed they were content with the papers, discussions and decisions taken at the meeting.

## **16. Any Other Business**

16.1 The Board noted the death of **John Simpson** on 27 March 2023. John was one of the Agency's Arbitrators for many years and was still chairing independent appeal hearings up and until his death.

## **17. Dates of Next Meeting**

17.1 The next Board meeting will be on 19 May 2023 at 10.00am in James House.  
**Action: Executive Assistant**