

**MINUTES OF THE 497TH MEETING OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY BOARD
HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 10.00AM AT THE LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY
HEAD OFFICE, JAMES HOUSE, 2-4 CROMAC AVENUE, BELFAST, BT7 2JA**

Present: Gordon Milligan (Chair)
Kevin McCabe
Mark Spence
Clare Duffield (Item 1-11)
Sarah Havlin
John Taylor
Lee Wilson

In Attendance: Mark McAllister Chief Executive
Anne Dorbie Interim Director of Corporate Services
Paul Lowe Temporary Director of Programme Delivery
Elaine Clarke Director of Employment Relations Services
Oliver Murray Executive Assistant

Apologies: Orla Sheils
Geraldine Alexander
Elizabeth Armstrong

The meeting was held the day after the Governance Review Workshop facilitated by EY in Malone House, Belfast.

Declarations of Interest: None.

1. Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The **Chair** welcomed Board members back for "Day 2", following the previous day's Board Strategy Day in Malone House, Belfast. It was noted that there would be a chance to discuss the workshop in detail later in the agenda.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed **Mark McAllister** to his first official board meeting as Chief Executive, as well as **Elaine Clarke**, who is attending her first Board meeting as Director of Employment Relations Services.

2. Horizon Scanning for Opportunities and Risks

- 2.1 The **Chief Executive** noted two documents directly relevant to the work of the Agency:
Actions 12, 14, 28 & 36 in the Department for the Economy's (DfE) Economic Vision 2024/25 document ([here](#)), and page 17 & 30 of the NI

Executive's Draft Programme for Government 2024-27 ([here](#)).

2.2 A detailed discussion was held on the current work of Engagement Forum.

3. Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 28 August 2024 in Magee Campus UU

3.1 The minutes of the Board meeting held on 28 August 2024 in Magee Campus UU (paper BP01-09/24) were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and are ready 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 BP02-09/24), which was noted by the Board.

4.2 The **Director of Programme Delivery** noted that the business case for an upgrade of the CMRS system was approved by DfE. This will now be brought to procurement stage.

4.3 An update was given on the Transformation project, which is due to officially go live on October 7 as scheduled. It was noted that co-design working groups on key systems and processes to support transformation are well underway.

4.4 Feedback from the recent staff conference was noted as being largely positive, themes throughout day were chiefly centred on transformation and adapting to change.

4.5 The **Interim Director of Corporate Services** noted that the lease of the regional office is still to be formally signed, but that this will be completed shortly.

4.6 It was requested that invitations and itinerary for the Diversity Mark summit, being held on 8 October, as well as a list of those successful in the Independent Appeal Hearing chairs to be distributed among the Board.

Action: Executive Assistant

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 The **Chief Executive** presented the Chief Executive's Report (paper BP03-09/24), which was noted by the Board.

5.2 The Chief Executive gave update on handover work to date from outgoing Chief Executive, **Don Leeson**, who has now officially retired from the post.

Handover arrangements are also in place.

- 5.3 The CEO had an introductory meeting with **Shane Murphy, Deputy Secretary** from the Department for the Economy (DfE), to establish communication and discuss key priorities for the Agency in the period ahead.
- 5.4 ERM **Elaine Clarke** was congratulated on her appointment as Director of Employment Relations Services.
- 5.5 An update was given on a recent recruitment and replenishment exercise for Independent Appeal Panel Chairs, which was completed mid-September with a new complement of 16 consisting of senior HR practitioners, senior trade union officials, solicitors, barristers, and independent HR consultants. A discussion was held regarding the work of Panel going forward.
- 5.6 The CEO was invited to speak with a delegation of 50 trade union officials from the USA as part of the Washington Ireland Programme to discuss the role of the Agency and its relationship with the FMCS in the United States.
- 5.7 The CEO met with **Audrey Cahill, CEO** of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Plans for the September 2025 International Industrial Relations Agencies conference which both Agencies will host in Dublin and Belfast were outlined.

Action: Chief Executive
- 5.8 A meeting was also held with the **CEO, Don, Scott Alexander, Carole Halford** and **Sarah Crozier** of Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter for a focused workshop on the Good Jobs Charter development.

6. Review of Board strategy day held yesterday (25/9/24)

- 6.1 A detailed discussion was held regarding the previous day's Board Strategy Day facilitated by EY.
- 6.2 It was noted as being a positive development that the Senior Management Team & the Board being largely in sync in their thinking. Feedback from this workshop will be provided to EY.
- 6.3 The **Chair** thanked all those who attended for their valuable input to the day's workshop.

7. Mediation Strategy

- 7.1 The **Chief Executive** presented the Mediation strategy (Paper BP04-09/24) which was then approved by the Board. This is the follow on from the board meeting on the development of a mediation strategy held in November 2023 (Paper BP 04-11/23).
- 7.2 The Chief Executive noted key issues and upcoming mediation events in the year ahead.

8. Investors in People (IIP) Evaluation Report and action plan.

- 8.1 The **Interim Director of Corporate Services** presented the Investors in People Report and Action Plan (BP05-09/24), which was noted by the Board.
- 8.2 The **Chair** congratulated all involved with the Agency being awarded the IIP Gold award, and remarked on the positive attitude of the Agency.
- 8.3 The three surveys that informed the evaluation will be collated into a single report and circulated to all staff.

Action: Interim Director of Corporate Services

- 8.4 The Board thanked **Angela Bryans** for her leadership in IIP.

9. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: Report on Meeting held on 9 September 2024 and two policies to approve

- 9.1 **Lee Wilson**, Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), presented the report on Meeting held on 9 September 2024 (BP Paper BP06-09/24) and two policies (BP07-09/24 and BP08-09/24), which were approved by the Board.
- 9.2 The ARAC Chair noted ERM **Kalvin Jones'** presentation on the current work of the WIS team was of great interest and value.
- 9.3 An update was given on currently ongoing internal and external audits. No concerns have been raised.
- 9.4 Risks relating to Holiday Pay conciliation case led to valuable discussion. It was requested that this risk should be separated out as a specific risk on its own.

Action: Director of Programme Delivery

- 9.5 The **Interim Director of Corporate Services** noted current budgetary position of Agency, which led to a follow-on discussion.
- 9.6 The issue of data breaches was raised, leading to a discussion on how to avoid future breaches and actions taken to mitigate repercussions.
- 9.7 One slight amendment was noted for the minutes presented in the report.
Action: Executive Assistant

10. Business Plan Performance Report for the Period Ended 31 August 2024

- 10.1 The Directors presented the Business Plan Performance Report for the period ending 31 August 2024 (Paper BP09-09/24) which was noted by the Board.
- 10.2 The **Director of Employment Relations** presented Strategic Theme 1, noting stats of current WIS calls and ongoing collective conciliation cases.
- 10.3 A discussion was held on the SLT review and its effect on the transformation process.
- 10.4 An update was given on recently released webinar recordings, with future webinar work noted.
- 10.5 The **Chief Executive** noted further work planned with the Agency's Communications Partner and Timely Careers to further promote good practice in flexible working, building on the March 2024 conference.
- 10.6 The **Interim Director of Corporate Services** gave an update on the Agency's current financial position.
- 10.7 The Board passed on their thanks to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, **Claire Webb** following the Silver Diversity Mark accreditation.
- 10.8 A business case is to be completed for the IT services as the current contract expires in March. A previous business case approved in June 2023 will be revisited and presented to the Board. A conversation was held regarding cyber-security and the migration to Cloud-based services.
Action: Director of Programme Delivery
- 10.9 It was requested that the draft job descriptions for SLT review to be re-circulated to the Board for further input.
Action: Executive Assistant

11. Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 August 2024

11.1 The **Interim Director of Corporate Services** presented the Management Accounts for the Period Ended 31 August 2024 (Paper BP10-09/24) which was noted by the Board.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 No other business was noted.

13. Review of the meeting

13.1 It was requested that nominations for the KPI subgroup discussed in yesterday's workshop to be circulated to Board members.

Action: Chief Executive

14. Date of Next Meeting

14.1 It was agreed that the next Board meeting would be held on 23 October 2024 as initially planned. The draft agenda for the meeting (paper BP11-09/24) was noted.

Action: Executive Assistant