



BOARD MEETING
12 April 2016 @ 10.00am

PRESENT:

Judith Thompson (Chair - **JT**)

Commissioner

IN ATTENDANCE:

John Beggs (**JB**)

Secretary to the Commission

Adrian McNamee (**AMN**)

Head of Policy and Research

Craig Gartley (**CG**)

Head of Corporate Services

Sarah Beare (**SB**) - minutes

1. Apologies

1.1. There were no apologies.

2. Declaration of Interests

2.1. All attendees confirmed they had no conflict of interests.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

3.1. The minutes of the meeting on 08 March 2016 were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

European Contacts

4.1. It was agreed to contact the European Commission to obtain contacts for engagement.

ACTION: AMN

File Storage Review

4.2. It was noted that the File Storage Review would take place on 14 April 2016. It was agreed to keep a record of the meeting and to forward questions to the VSS in advance of the meeting.

ACTION: JB

5. Opening Budget 2016/17

5.1. **JB** advised that the Commission's budget letter had been received on 07 March 2016 which confirmed a budget reduction of 4% on the opening budget for the 2016/17 financial year.

5.2. The Commission's Total Resource Allocation was confirmed as £859,000 for 2016/17 and was accepted by **JT**.

5.3. **CG** advised that the Commissioning Letter for the June Monitoring Round had been received on 12 April 2016 with a deadline of 15 April 2016.

6. Annual Report and Accounts 15/16

- 6.1. **CG** presented the NIAO Audit Strategy. It was noted that no significant risk had been identified. Risk factors to note were the accounts preparation due to this being the first year the Commission will have completed the accounts preparation with no support or involvement from an accountancy firm.
- 6.2. The Letter of Understanding was noted.
- 6.3. It was noted that an introductory meeting with the NIAO Director would take place on 09 May 2016.

7. Internal Audit 2015/16 and 2016/17

- 7.1. **CG** advised that the draft Annual Internal Audit Assurance Report 2015/16 had been presented at the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 06 April 2016, highlighting that an External Quarterly Assurance (EQA) would be commissioned and undertaken by the Commission's Sponsor Department during 2016/17. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed that the report could now be issued as final but would be subject to the discretion of the new Committee once in place.

8. Corporate Plan 2016-19 (and Business Plan 2016/17)

- 8.1. Following the submission of a first working draft Business Plan 2016/17 on 29 January 2016, **JB** submitted the most recent drafts of the Business and Corporate Plans to the Department on 01 April 2016.
- 8.2. **JB** had advised the Department that the Commission intended to review the Corporate Plan on receipt of the Review of the Strategy report which was expected in June 2016. This would enable the Commission to take account of any new/emerging recommendations arising for the remaining period of the Strategy. Plans would then be re-submitted for consideration.
- 8.3. It was noted that the Commission had consulted with the Forum, Department, and Commission staff on the 2016/17 Business Plan and key areas where resources had been allocated across objectives were highlighted.
- 8.4. There had been no significant changes from last year however an emphasis had been placed on service reporting and monitoring.
- 8.5. A discussion took place regarding the framework for reporting output measures that the Commission had been asked to use. It was noted that there had been difficulty agreeing definitive outputs using this framework as it was not designed to capture outputs related to Policy, Research and Advice. It was agreed that SMT would discuss this further at their next meeting.

ACTION: JB, AMN, CG

- 8.6. **CG** advised that the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee had questioned the Commission's position in relation to use of the outcome based accountability approach as suggested by him at an earlier meeting. **CG** had advised that a meeting had taken place with NISRA and a matrix was being developed to possibly include this in the future. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and a Committee member registered their disappointment in the delay and requested that it be followed up with **JB**. Another Committee member had suggested that this be made a target in the Business Plan.
- 8.7. It was noted that the Audit and Risk Committee had no issues with the Business objectives, just the delay to the use of an outcome based accountability.
- 8.8. Following a discussion on consultation on advice, it was agreed to speak to the Department about timeframes for advice.

ACTION: JB

9. Business Plan 2016/17

- 9.1. Please see notes at 8.
- 9.2. An update was provided on the Pension Project. It was noted that the Invitation to Tender had gone out with a closing date of 12 February 2016 and that the contract had been awarded to a Specialist Legislative Drafter. It was noted that the policy issue around the Pension needed to be resolved before legal advice is taken on implantation/drafting issues.
- 9.3. It was noted that a meeting with QUB to ensure work on the Pension Project would not be duplicated would take place on 14 April 2016.
- 9.4. **JT** advised that she had been made aware of some confusion around the Commission's Pension Project and wished to provide clarification to political parties. **AMN** advised that he had also received a query from the Department.
- 9.5. It was agreed that correspondence providing clarification would be drafted following the meeting with QUB and would be sent to the Department and parties.

ACTION: AMN

- 9.6. **JT** advised that she had had some conversations with Political Advisors since her return from the US and noted that there seemed to be a willingness on their part to engage in dialogue as discussed during meetings in the US. They had advised that the best time for this dialogue would be after the elections (allowing a week or two for the process of allocating Ministerial roles to be completed) and before the EU referendum. It was noted that this would be late May/early June 2016. It was noted that the US Consulate was keen to facilitate progress and had offered to host some meetings. It was agreed that **JT** would contact Pablo de Greiff to issue an invitation.

ACTION: JT

10.Accounting Officer's Update

Budget

- 10.1. **JB** advised that the Commission's anticipated total spend in 2015/16 was £860,309 with an underspend of £3,691 or 0.43% which was within the tolerance level limit of 1.5%.
- 10.2. It was noted that the Finance Officer was awaiting final invoices.
- 10.3. **JT** acknowledged the collective effort of all staff to meet year end targets.
- 10.4. **CG** advised that a member of the Audit and Risk Committee had accepted that underspend was within tolerance at the meeting on 06 April 2016 but had queried why the amount differed from the projected overspend indicated at the last Audit and Risk Committee meeting in January 2016.
- 10.5. **CG** explained that this was due to anticipated spend on agency workers being reduced due to a number of them obtaining full time employment elsewhere and highlighted the key areas of spend in the final quarter of the year.
- 10.6. **JB** acknowledged that small fluctuations were expected.
- 10.7. The 2016/17 budget was discussed. It was noted that resources had been broadly allocated across the budget headings and each budget line was reviewed.
- 10.8. **CG** advised that the Forum would not meet during April-June 2016 which would have an impact on the budget but that costs for Induction/Training for new Forum members was anticipated.
- 10.9. **AMN** advised that the Conference budget had been reduced for 2016/17 and a one day Conference would take place in year.
- 10.10. **JT** approved the 2016/17 budget.

Update on Business Cases and Procurement (Delegated decisions)

- 10.11. The update on Business Cases and Procurement included all delegated decisions taken by the Accounting Officer since the last Board meeting. The Schedule was reviewed and new projects were noted.
- 10.12. **CG** advised that procurement was being progressed for Communications Support Services 2016-18 and the Printing and Publishing of Commission Documents for 2016-19.
- 10.13. **CG** advised that a contract for Printing and Publishing of Commission documents minimised the administration required to procure and print Commission documents and allowed for greater flexibility while adhering to good practice. **JT** was content with this.
- 10.14. **JT** requested an infographic which could be printed and used at client meetings and events. Infographics from Belfast City Council and the NI Fire Service were used as examples.
- 10.15. **JB** advised that the initial evaluation of tenders received for the Communications Support Services 2016-18 had taken place on 01 April 2016. Following the review and evaluation of the tenders received, the panel agreed that further clarification interviews should take place. Interviews would take place on 21 April 2016.

Performance Report

- 10.16. The final 2015/16 Business Plan was discussed. Targets that had been completed were noted.
- 10.17. It was noted that 4 out of 50 targets were amber.

Risk Management

- 10.18. Updates to the Risk Register were discussed.
- 10.19. The Commission's Risk Register currently contains 1 high rated risk with red status, 2 medium rated risks with amber status and 2 low rated risks with green status.
- 10.20. It was noted that targets for CR1 and CR2 had been updated.
- 10.21. **JT** again highlighted the need to log issues with responses from the VSS under CR1, Failure to effectively review the VSS through lack of communication, data or verification of systems. She advised that this had been raised with the Chair of the VSS Board who had expressed his disappointment. It was agreed that this would be kept under review.

ACTION: JB

- 10.22. A VSS Customer Satisfaction Survey was discussed. **AMN** advised that this had been recommended previously.
- 10.23. It was agreed that at the next Trilateral meeting, **JB** would raise the need to review the Commission's MOU with the VSS and to look at oversight arrangements and outcome data.

ACTION: JB

- 10.24. **JT** advised that, going forward, she wanted the Business Plan and Corporate Plan to flow into the Risk Register and noted that mitigating actions should be reflected.
- 10.25. **JT** was content with updates to the Risk Register.
- 10.26. The revised Risk Management Strategy was discussed. **JB** advised that the Risk Management Strategy had been approved by the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board in October 2015.
- 10.27. **CG** advised that the Strategy had been updated to reflect updated to the NICS Strategy.
- 10.28. The Risk Management Strategy was approved.

Pay Awards

- 10.29. It was noted that the 14/15 Pay Remit had been approved by DFP and the Finance Minister. 4 members of staff had received their back pay in their March 2016 salaries. A query raised regarding the remaining 3 members of staff had been clarified with the remaining staff to receive their back pay in April 2016.

10.30. It was agreed to amend the draft letter to Mark Browne of the Finance, Strategic Planning and Social Change Directorate regarding approval of the 2014/15 and 2015/16 Pay Remit and to send it as a cover letter with the submission of the 2015/16 Pay Remit.

ACTION: JB/CG

10.31. **CG** advised that he would begin work on the 2015/16 Pay Remit once final figures for the 2014/15 Pay Remit had been confirmed. He anticipated submitting the 2015/16 Pay Remit within 2-3 weeks.

ACTION: CG

Staffing

10.32. It was noted that the Commission had 2 vacancies. Recruitment exercises were underway to fill the Head of Communications and Engagement and Engagement Support Officer posts.

10.33. **CG** advised that the role of Engagement Support Officer post had been advertised in the week beginning 28 March 2016 with a closing date of 15 April 2016. Sifting would take place from 27-29 April 2016 with interviews on 23-27 May 2016.

10.34. It was noted that 3 members of Commission staff would sit on the panel for the Engagement Support Officer post.

10.35. It was noted that the Project Initiation meeting for the Head of Engagement and Communication and ARAC Members would take place on 15 April 2016. The panels would agree dates for advertisements, sifting and interviews at the meeting on 15 April 2016.

10.36. It was noted that 2 members of Commission staff and an independent panel member would sit on the panel for the Head of Engagement and Corporate Services.

10.37. A discussion took place regarding the 3rd panel member for the Recruitment if ARAC members. It was noted that the Director of Social Investment and Victims Division would sit on the ARAC panel and that it had been discussed with the Chair of the current Audit and Risk Committee. It was agreed to ascertain the availability of the Chair of the current Audit and Risk Committee.

ACTION: CG

Review of the Commission

10.38. It was noted that no date had been confirmed for the triennial review in 2016/17.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

10.39. See notes at 10.32-10.37 relating to the Recruitment of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) Members.

10.40. It was noted that a date for the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report meeting was being progressed. It was agreed to arrange lunch for the meeting.

ACTION: CG

Gifts & Hospitality

10.41. All Gifts and Hospitality for the last quarter had been recorded and approved by the Accounting Officer. No exceptional gifts or hospitality had been received or provided.

10.42. All Registers for the last quarter were available on the Commission's website.

Fraud

10.43. There had been no reported instances of fraud during the reported period.

Freedom of Information

10.44. No FOI requests had been received this quarter.

Complaints

- 10.45. 1 complaint was received in quarter 4 of 2015/16.
- 10.46. It was noted that following an investigation, in line with the Commission's complaints procedure, the complaint was not upheld. The complainant was unhappy with the decision and wished to escalate his complaint. **CG** had received a telephone message from the complainant and would return the call.

11.Update on the Appointment of a Panel to Sustain Victims and Survivors Forum Membership 2016-19

- 11.1. It was noted that the Appointment of a Panel to Sustain Victims and Survivors Forum Membership 2016-19 would launch on 13 April 2016 and the deadline for Expressions of Interest was 04 May 2016.
- 11.2. It was noted that a communications briefing would take place on 12 April 2016 and risks relating to media coverage were discussed.
- 11.3. An update from the Forum Manager was discussed and noted.
- 11.4. The original provider of external HR support was no longer available and another provider had been asked to provide 20.5 days of support to sift and assist with administrative pressures.
- 11.5. **JB** acknowledged the work of the Forum Manager in relation to the Appointment of a Panel to Sustain Victims and Survivors Forum Membership 2016-19.

12.Removable Media Policy

- 12.1. The Removable Media Policy was discussed.
- 12.2. **JT** asked for clarification on updates to the Policy.
- 12.3. **CG** advised that there had been no significant changes and the Policy had been updated in line with NICS Guidance.
- 12.4. It was noted that the Removable Media Policy now referenced other relevant Commission policies.
- 12.5. The Removable Media Policy was approved.

13. Guidance on Gifts & Hospitality

- 13.1. The Guidance on Gifts and Hospitality was discussed.
- 13.2. **CG** advised that the Policy had been updated in line with NICS Guidance and there had been no significant changes.
- 13.3. The Guidance on Gifts and Hospitality was approved.

14.Business Continuity Plan

- 14.1. The Business Continuity Plan had been updated following the full test which had been carried out in January 2016.
- 14.2. **JT** asked for an update on learning following the test. **CG** advised that there had been a few networking issues for staff while at Castle Buildings in terms of accessing emails and the VPN.
- 14.3. It was noted that social media had been used well to redirect clients/callers and to provide information on how to contact the Commission during the test.
- 14.4. It was noted that the Commission could only initially provide a skeleton service should an incident or further test occur.
- 14.5. **CG** advised that the Commission had sought advice from ECNI in relation to the Business Continuity plan. ECNI had received substantial assurance from audit.
- 14.6. A discussion took place regarding the flexibility for staff working externally.
- 14.7. The Business Continuity Plan was approved.

15.Safeguarding Children and young People Policy

- 15.1. **CG** advised that he had received feedback on the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy from an external Consultant and significant changes to the Policy were required.
- 15.2. **CG** recommended procuring the services of the external Consultant to formally review the Policy as the Commission did not have specialist resources in house.
- 15.3. It was noted that the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy was also coming up for review.
- 15.4. **JT** advised that the VSS may use the Commission's Safeguarding Policies as a benchmark for their own so it was important to ensure the Policy was properly drafted.
- 15.5. **JT** was content with the rationale for procuring the services of the external Consultant and asked **CG** to proceed with this.

ACTION: CG

- 15.6. **JT** registered her concern with the timeframe for having a Policy in place noting that she had recently dealt with an issue relating to Safeguarding.

16.Update on Peace IV

- 16.1. **AMN** provided an update on Peace IV Programme including milestones and an indicative timeframe.
- 16.2. It was noted that the Stage I application had been submitted and the Steering Committee would assess applications on 11 May 2016.
- 16.3. The Project Summary and costs were discussed.
- 16.4. It was agreed to seek clarification of CVS responsibilities in relation to Studies/Survey (External Expertise and Services).

ACTION: AMN

- 16.5. A discussion around Stage II and proposals for a Research Plan took place.
- 16.6. **AMN** advised that Commission staff had assisted in providing information to the VSS in order to complete the Stage I application form. In particular, Commission staff provided the primary research in relation to 4 of the 5 areas of activity for the Project, namely, the Advocacy Support Programme, the Case Worker Support Programme, the Resilience Programme and the Research.
- 16.7. A discussion took place around collaborative working amongst funded groups. It was agreed that **JB** would share a report from the Collaborative Design Workshops in 2015.

ACTION: JB

17.AOB

Papers for meeting's

- 17.1. **JT** requested that Board papers be issued a week in advance of each meeting going forward.

Car Parking

- 17.2. **JT** raised the issue of disabled car parking for visitors at Equality House and suggested approaching other organisations in Equality House to ask them to let disabled visitors avail of their parking spaces when required.
- 17.3. **CG** advised that there were few usable spaces for disabled parking in Equality House.
- 17.4. It was agreed that the issue would be raised with the Chief Executive of ECNI.

ACTION: JB

NAME: **Judith Thompson**

SIGNED: 

DATE: 10/05/16