

**Minutes of the Board Meeting  
Monday 19 May 2020 at 10:30-12.30**

**Meeting held remotely by video conference**

**Present:**

Mrs Helen Pitcher (Chairman)  
Miss Karen Kneller (Chief Executive)  
Mrs Sally Berlin (Director of Casework Operations)  
Ms Heather Lees (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)  
Mr Peter Ryan (Interim Director of Finance & Corporate Services)  
Mr David Brown (Non-Executive Director)  
Mrs Linda Lee (Non-Executive Director)  
Mr Rob Ward (Non-Executive Director)  
Mr Andre Katz (Independent Non-Executive Director)  
Mr Martin Spencer (Independent Non-Executive Director)

**Apologies:** None

**1. Declarations of interest:**

None

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of previous Board meetings held on 30 March and 27 April 2020 were approved.

**3. Action Matrix**

The CEO would follow up on Artificial Intelligence with MoJ to consider AI; AI would be captured within the Transformation Programme.

**4. Chairman's update**

The Secretary of State had written to the Chairman commending the Commission's innovative approach to working in response to the challenges the Coronavirus.

The Chairman had spoken to Colin Carruthers QC, Chairman of the New Zealand CCRC. Discussions included holding a virtual meeting with CCRC, the Scottish CCRC and the Norwegian CCRC.

Following recent appraisals, a number of Commissioners had offered to help with broader duties which supported the external communications strategy.

**5. Chief Executive's report**

The report including management information and a covid- 19 update was noted.

The CEO confirmed that approximately 10% of the workforce was affected by Covid-19 which included those shielding or self-isolating. Managers were regularly in touch with staff and group

meetings were being held via Microsoft Teams but other platforms with additional facilities would also be considered.

The interim DFCS was focussing on getting the office and facilities ready by 1<sup>st</sup> June for a very limited return to the office. Our approach continues to be if staff can work from home, they should.

## **6. Casework Report**

The DCO report was noted. The number of new applications was low because of the situation in prisons with covid-19. The Customer Service Manager was in regular contact with prisons regarding this. In the meantime the focus was on progressing longer running cases. Business and operational plans would be kept under review in light of changes in application rates.

## **7. Transformation Project update**

The report was noted.

The unconfirmed moving date to new offices would be delayed by 8-10 weeks because of building delays during covid-19.

The CEO stressed the urgency of having all staff networked by the end of July; the Interim DFCS would provide her a progress report.

The Board requested that the Programme Board specifically reports on the timetable, budget and business benefit in future updates.

## **8. External Communications Strategy**

The Board approved the strategy. The new strategy aimed at being more transparent within the statutory framework and guidance on this would be provided to help those engaging with stakeholders. A stakeholder mapping exercise would also be carried out as part of the operational plans supporting the strategy.

All Commissioners had expressed an interest in being involved with stakeholder events provided this did not impact on their casework role. It was agreed that the CEO would take part in a special purpose stakeholder forum to talk about issues arising from covid-19.

A rolling events programme would be produced with flexibility to add in ad hoc events.

## **9. Approach to implementing quality**

The DCO reported that the new formal Quality Management System would be introduced in a phased approach beginning with casework including enhancing training and development. Formal certification would not be sought at this stage.

## **10. The New normal**

The Board discussed how the organisation was adapting to the new ways of working.

The CEO reported that phase one of the work was underway to facilitate the return to the office of a very small number of staff. However, given current government advice and the need for social distancing, there would be no return of scale to the office. The Board noted that homeworking provided opportunities as well as challenges for some all of which needed to be considered. It was agreed that keeping connected with staff as the organisation become decentralised was vital.

The second phase of work was centred on the office move and new accommodation. The Commission's lease expires Christmas 2020 so decisions will need to be taken regarding office space, layout and function without having the luxury of waiting to see how covid-19 would impact on working life going forward in 2021 and later. Those decisions would be based on the need to prioritise staff safety and to ensure casework continues to flow. Decisions would need to be taken in the context of there being very little hard information about covid-19, the expectation that social distancing would continue for some time, and the continued risk of a second surge. The Board agreed that those who could should work from home as it provided the safest environment. To facilitate this it was important to get all staff on the remote network as quickly as possible.

The Smarter Ways of Working Group (a work stream of the Transformation Programme) would revise its Terms of Reference to factor in covid-19. The Chairman was encouraged that all the Commissioners had said they were keen to talk to staff and attend group meetings.

## **11. Any other business**

There had been a very positive response to the Commissioner recruitment campaign.

## **12. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 16 June at 12.30 a single purpose meeting to approve Annual Report & Accounts only.