

**Minutes of the Board Meeting  
Tuesday 26 January 2021 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)  
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 Mark Oldham (Independent Non-Executive Director)  
Mr Martin Spencer (Independent Non-Executive Director)

**Apologies:** None

**1. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed the Board it was Sally Berlin's last meeting. On behalf of the Board, the Chairman thanked Sally for her hard work and loyal service to the Commission and congratulated Sally on her new position.

**2. Declarations of interest:**

None

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

The minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 24 November 2020 were approved.

**4. Action Matrix**

Setting up a steering group for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference remained outstanding; the CEO confirmed that it was being attended to.

**5. Chief Executive's report**

The Management Information Pack was noted by the Board.

The Chief Executive reported that no members of staff were currently absent due to Covid but there was a sense of lock-down fatigue. A recent training event was well attended by staff and more similar events were planned to boost staff engagement. It was agreed that there would be a People agenda item going forward.

The staff survey outcome was noted showing improvement in six out of nine areas. There continues to be significant concern around pay.

Odgers had been instructed to conduct the campaign in respect of the Director of Casework. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services position would be advertised through a government wide campaign.

The CEO and Chairman wanted an early meeting with Antonia Romeo, the new Permanent Secretary.

CEO updated the Board regarding budget submission which was designed to protect casework and enable enhanced outreach, media and diversity both internally and externally. This is separate to the Transformation Programme budget.

The CEO and RW had attended a productive preliminary meeting with the Law Commission who were deciding the new programme of work. There is likely to be public consultation after Easter when the Commission will have the opportunity to make a formal submission.

A steering group for the 2022 Conference will be set up by end February and will include the Chairman, LL and Ian Comfort, Commissioner.

## **6. Chairman's update**

The Chairman reported that 18 candidates had been interviewed for the Commissioner role resulting in 4 names being submitted to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister's office for approval. The Chairman's extension was still waiting approval. The Chairman was currently conducting Commissioners' appraisals and it was clear that they wanted to be more involved with outreach work.

A RemCo meeting had been held in January.

The Chairman was due to meet the Secretary of State in February and asked the Board for any specific topics they wanted raising.

## **7. Casework report to note**

Casework had performed well notwithstanding the CMS roll-out requiring casework staff to familiarise themselves with new ways of working; there was also a high level of annual leave in December. The number of long running cases is reducing and 3 referrals were made in the November/December period.

There was concern about the lower number of new applications received. The DCO was investigating the use of authorised mobile phones for prisoners to use to contact the Commission. This was now being escalated.

The DCO reported that there was the possibility of a large number of additional Post Office cases. The DCO was concerned that current resources were not adequate notwithstanding a current CRM recruitment exercise which is underway. Some "flex" is available through former interns.

## **8. Transformation Programme Report to note**

The DFCS reported that the gsi email was expiring at the end of March and a new format had been put in place. The new website had been delayed but was coming back on track. The core upgrade of the Finance system took place in December. The procurement for a replacement

HR system has begun. Work has begun to set up a project to look at the Finance and BIS teams and the impact of the transformation programme.

The Board discussed the new CMS and time recording. Concern was expressed that it was difficult to record time or locate where it could be recorded and this could result in low take up which would distort the cost (or time taken) per case. The DFCS is keeping this under review; it is anticipated that there needs to be 3 – 6 months' worth of data to evaluate the process properly. However, the DFCS stressed that evaluation was on-going.

#### **9. 2021-22 Business Plan update to note**

The Board agreed that it was important to carry out process review work first which could then support the introduction of AI. This review work included looking at the BIS and Finance Teams first, followed by CAT and ACAT and maybe the Legal department.

The DFCS hoped the finalised Business Plan could go to the March Board but it was dependent on whether the Budget was received.

#### **2020-21 Business Plan progress to note**

The Board noted the progress of the current business plan.

#### **10. Stakeholder mapping for discussion**

AK offered to help with the mapping and would discuss this further with the CEO.

#### **11. Any other business**

McKinsey & Company article – “Overcoming pandemic fatigue” for discussion.

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

Tuesday 23 March at 10.30 am

The Chairman thanked the Board for their support and particularly SMT who are working extremely hard.