

**Minutes of the Public Board Meeting
Tuesday 24 November 2020 at 10.00-11.30**

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 Commission's first public Board meeting. Attendees included stakeholders and interested parties including the Scottish CCRC and CCRC Commissioners and staff.

2. Declarations of interest:

None

3. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 29 September 2020 were approved.

4. Action Matrix

The first meeting of the steering group for the Commission's 25th Anniversary Conference was expected to take place in the next month.

The stakeholder events schedule will be circulated to the Board.

5. Chairman's update

The Chairman is due to meet the Lord Chief Justice and President of the Queen's Bench Division in December.

The Chairman reported that the Commission had made a submission to the House of Lords Constitution Committee, Inquiry into the Constitutional Implications of Covid-19 on the workings of courts and tribunals.

It was noted that the Westminster Commission had not announced when their report would be published.

The Chairman had been interviewed by Evan Davis for BBC R4's PM Programme in October. Discussion points included issues with delayed trials, possible changes to jury trial system and legal aid cuts and implications for miscarriages of justice. The interview went very well and the Chairman had been invited to return on a future occasion.

The Chairman was delighted to report that the Commission had made its 750th referral.

The Commissioner recruitment campaign was ongoing; interviews were scheduled for the beginning of January. Andre Katz, Independent non-executive director and Chair of Audit & Risk Assurance Committee, has been renewed for a second term. The Chairman and CEO had recently met remotely 4 new starters who were enthusiastic about joining the Commission. The Chairman together with Ian Comfort, Commissioner, and 2 members of staff were planning an online Christmas event for staff which was seen as essential in keeping everyone connected.

6. Chief Executive's report

The Management Information Pack was noted by the Board.

The Chief Executive reported that the Transformation Programme had delivered the new IT and casework management system ahead of schedule. This was a significant achievement given the challenging circumstances the organisation was working in.

Casework was continuing to perform well with committees taking place remotely. Staff have adapted to working remotely with only a small number attending the office. Managers had been carrying out mid-year reviews and were supporting staff and considering their welfare.

The Director of Casework Operations was sifting the 99 applications received for Case Review Manager positions. For the first time applications are open to individuals who do not need to be office based.

The CEO and Director of Casework Operations had met recently with the Registrar, Court of Appeal Criminal Division.

The Board discussed the impact of Covid-19 on casework. Application numbers had fallen early during lockdown but had fluctuated with one month seeing a higher number than the pre-Covid period. The Customer Service Manager had arranged for the Commission to appear on National Prison Radio and continued to work with the Prison Service to ensure intake is maximised. Additional impacts on casework performance included staff sickness and some national Microsoft outages.

The Board discussed the recent Go Live of Microsoft 365. Daily training surgeries, materials and videos had been made available and members of the Transformation Programme were on hand to help with queries. There had been challenges with some aspects of training given remote working; and specialist and tailored training would be provided to assist. Microsoft Dynamics, the new Casework Management System, launched on 23 November; first impressions were that it was more intuitive than previous systems. The Board noted the huge advances made as a result of the Transformation Programme and thanked everyone involved for their hard work.

The CEO noted that with the possibility of more cuts to legal aid there was likely to be an increase in applications to the Commission. Together with the imminent spending review it was important to continue working efficiently and effectively to continue to provide high quality

casework. The DFCS reported that Covid related costs had been incurred and he was looking to MoJ to reimburse.

7. Casework performance during and since Covid-19

The Director of Casework Operations reported that casework had responded well to Covid-19 challenges and performance was high. 60 referrals had been made in the current business year. This included Post Office Horizon Computer cases, each one of which had to be examined separately. These referrals were significant; the applicants affected had been greatly impacted by their experience of Post Office prosecutions.

The DCO noted that the Commission's 750th referral turned on a potential alternative suspect as a result of DNA findings.

8. Transformation Programme update

The DFCS reported that the Transformation Programme had successfully rolled out the new systems considerably ahead of schedule. The Board noted that this achievement was set against the backdrop of the pandemic which necessitated diverting some Transformation Programme resource to remote working over the Spring putting pressure on the Programme team.

The new Finance and HR systems would be rolled out in December.

The new website work provided by MoJ was slightly behind schedule; it was now likely to be complete in January.

The Board congratulated the DFCS and the Programme and IT teams and noted their considerable hard work and commitment in delivering the new systems for the Commission.

9. Any other business

None

The Chairman thanked everybody for giving their time to join the Commission's first public board meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 26 January at 10.30 am