

NI GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY EXTRA-ORDINARY BOARD MEETING - 27th March 2020

- Present:** Mrs Gemma Loughran, *Chair*
Mr Peter Reynolds, *Chief Executive*
Mrs Gillian McGaughey, *Non-Executive Director*
Mr Lee Wilson, *Non-Executive Director*
Mr Fred Smyth, *Non-Executive Director*
Ms Veronica Callaghan, *Non-Executive Director*
- In Attendance:** Mr Sean Brown, *Corporate Services Manager*
- Minute Taker:** Mrs Ann Andrew, *Administration Manager*

START TIME: 9.30am

14.20 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 14.20.1 An Extra-Ordinary meeting of the Board took place by teleconference on *Friday 27th March 2020, 10am*. Mrs Gemma Loughran, newly appointed Chair of NIGALA (wef 23rd March 2020) welcomed all members to this, her first meeting of the NIGALA Board. She welcomed Ms Veronica Callaghan who also has been newly appointed as Non-Executive Director (wef 23rd March 2020).
- 14.20.2 All members of the Board spoke and provided a brief synopsis of themselves for information to newly appointed colleagues.

15.20 CEO UPDATE/RECRUITMENT PROCESS

- 15.20.1 Mr Reynolds indicated he felt it his duty to put his retirement *on hold* and see the Agency through this difficult COVID-19 phase. He noted he has informed the DoH that he will not be pressing his retirement at the moment but will be revisiting it in due course.
- 15.20.2 Mrs Loughran informed the Board she is required to write formally to the DoH informing them of Mr Reynolds' intention to retire and request authority to run a recruitment process to fill the Chief Executive role. Mr Smyth noted his concern over delaying formal notice to the DoH and suggested this proceed. Ms Callaghan

noted her agreement with Mr Smyth given that recruitment is a lengthy process. The Board agreed that correspondence should be forwarded to Ms Eilis McDaniel noting Mr Reynolds's intention to retire and seek permission to recruit when practical (ie within the next 6 months). Mrs Loughran and Mr Reynolds to agree correspondence to reflect same.

- 15.20.3 Mrs Loughran noted that correspondence about the pay scale/history of concerns about the pay level of the Chief Executive position should be raised with the DoH. She indicated she would raise this formally with the DoH.

ACTION: DoH to be informed of Mr Reynolds' plan to retire and seek authority to recruit for the position.

ACTION: DoH to be informed of the pay scale/history of concerns over the pay scale of the Chief Executive position.

16.20 UPDATE ON AGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

- 16.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Response to COVID-19* and Mr Brown spoke to this. He confirmed the Agency enacted its Business Continuity Plan and it had become a tailored response specifically for COVID-19. Mr Brown confirmed that in the last 12 months all staff have been moved from desktop working to laptops and this now means that everyone, including administration staff, can work from home. BSO IT is having some difficulty with the sheer volume of people in the HSC now working from home but is working to improve things.
- 16.20.2 Mr Brown noted that NIGALA will be impacted by what happens with our Stakeholders (HSC Trusts, NI Court & Tribunal Services, etc). HSC Trusts have stopping work on new cases and this will affect new cases coming into NIGALA. It also raises the need for NIGALA to plan for a future influx of backlogged work that will be coming into the Agency later in the year when COVID-19 restrictions have passed. Mr Brown noted at the moment the plan is working with all staff working from home, albeit in a different manner.
- 16.20.3 Mr Smyth indicated that the Audit & Risk Committee had met earlier in the month and discussed COVID-19, albeit they had not anticipated such extremes. Mr Brown indicated there has been conflicting information from the court service and at this point in time different courts seems to be operating differently. Mr Smyth stressed the need to liaise with family law/courts in regard to the difficulties here and get some clarity about what cases can be progressed. He highlighted the key role of

NIGALA is to ensure no damaging delay for the child. It was agreed that the Chief Executive should reflect this conversation and write to the Lord Chief Justice and liaise appropriately with DoH and Directors of Social Services.

16.20.4 Mr Wilson noted this should be added to the NIGALA Risk Register; Mr Brown agreed to update accordingly.

16.20.5 **Staff Welbeing:** Mr Brown indicated that all staff are being kept updated with issues. He noted the need for good mental health and good communication at this moment in time. Ms Callaghan referred to the profile of staff and vulnerable groups and consideration to be given should things change in the coming weeks. She queried if it was possible for Line Managers to make contact with their staff on a weekly basis. Mr Brown indicated that Ms O’Kane and Ms Fallon are already making contact with all their staff. Whatsapp groups are also being established to keep people in contact.

16.20.6 **Contingency Arrangements:** Contingency arrangements for the NIGALA Board and CEO were considered.

- **NIGALA Board:** Mr Wilson suggested contingency arrangements be put in place for the NIGALA Board. It was agreed that the Standing Orders would be reviewed and amendments made to the quorum for meetings should this be necessary. It was agreed that Mr Smyth the chair of the Audit & Risk Committee would step in as deputy for the NIGALA Chair should Mrs Loughran be off due to COVID-19.
- **Accounting Officer:** Mr Reynolds indicated that correspondence has been received from Mr Pengelly requesting that all Accounting Officers nominate two individuals who will step into the role should he be off sick due to COVID-19. He confirmed he has nominated Mr Brown in the first instance, followed by Ms O’Kane on the occasion that Mr Brown is also unavailable.

Ms Callaghan indicated that deputising arrangements should be considered at every Board meeting for the time being.

16.20.7 **Induction for Mrs Loughran / Ms Callaghan:** Mr Brown queried how induction should proceed for the newly appointed Chair and Non-Executive Director. It was agreed that all papers being used in the induction programme should be forwarded on for reading.

16.20.8 **Next Meeting of the Board:** Mr Brown indicated that the April 2020 meeting of the Board usually has quite a large agenda due to end of year accounts. Mrs Loughran, Mr Reynolds and Mr Brown agreed to prepare the agenda outside of this meeting.

16.20.9 **Thanks to Staff:** Mrs Loughran noted the NIGALA Board wished to record its thanks to all members of staff who are continuing to work in very difficult circumstances. She requested that her appreciation be circulated to everyone.

ACTION: Mr Reynolds to seek clarity in respect of court operations and write formally to LCJ and liaise appropriately with DoH and Directors of Social Work.

ACTION: Mr Brown to update NIGALA Risk Register.

ACTION: Mr Brown to review/update the Standing Orders.

ACTION: Mr Brown to review and forward all relevant documents for induction to Mrs Loughran and Ms Callaghan.

ACTION: Mrs Loughran, Mr Reynolds and Mr Brown to discuss and finalise the agenda for the next Board meeting.

ACTION: Thanks from the NIGALA Board to be circulated to staff.

17.20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

17.20.1 There was no other business for discussion.

18.20 CONFIDENTIAL SECTION

18.20.1 There was one item for discussion.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 23rd APRIL 2020 AT 9.30 AM

Chair of the Board

A C T I O N L I S T

Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
15.20 CEO Update/ Recruitment Process	DoH to be informed of Mr Reynolds' plan to retire and seek authority to recruit for the position.	Mrs Loughran	<i>Complete</i>
	DoH to be informed of the pay scale/history of concerns over the pay scale of the Chief Executive position.	Mrs Loughran	<i>Complete</i>
16.20 Update on Agency Response to COVID- 19	Mr Reynolds to seek clarity in respect of court operations and write formally to LCJ and liaise appropriately with DoH and Directors of Social Work.	Mr Reynolds	<i>Complete</i>
	Mr Brown to update NIGALA Risk Register.	Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>
	Mr Brown to review/update the Standing Orders.	Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>
	Mr Brown to review and forward all relevant documents for induction to Mrs Loughran and Ms Callaghan.	Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>
	Mrs Loughran, Mr Reynolds and Mr Brown to discuss and finalise the agenda for the next Board meeting.	Mrs Loughran/ Mr Reynolds/ Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>
	Thanks from the NIGALA Board to be circulated to staff.	Mr Reynolds	<i>Complete</i>