

**CHILDREN'S COURT GUARDIAN AGENCY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
BOARD MEETING – 22<sup>nd</sup> JUNE 2023**

**Present:** Mrs Gemma Loughran, *Chair*  
Ms Dawn Shaw, CEO  
Ms Veronica Callaghan, Non-Executive Director  
Mr David Douglas, Non-Executive Director  
Mr Lee Wilson, Non-Executive Director

**In Attendance:** Mr Sean Brown, Head of Corporate Services  
Ms Patricia O’Kane, Assistant Director  
Ms Teresa Fallon, Assistant Director  
Ms Gillian Kelly (Observer)

**Minute Taker:** Mrs Ann Andrew, Business Support Manager

**START TIME: 12.30pm**

Mrs Loughran welcomed Ms Kelly, who is participating on the QUB/UUJ/CPANI Mentoring Scheme and being mentored by Ms Shaw, to the meeting. Members provided an overview of their role and experience of sitting on the Board, for information purposes.

**35.23 SERVICE PRESENTATION**

35.23.1 The planned service presentation was postponed to the next meeting.

**36.23 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

36.23.1 Mrs Loughran provided an opportunity for the Board members to identify any conflict of interest in respect of today’s agenda. None were noted.

**37.23 MINUTE OF LAST MEETING**

37.23.1 The minute from the last meeting of the Board on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023 was reviewed and approved as an accurate record, proposed by Ms Callaghan.

37.23.2 Mrs Loughran thanked the Board for travelling to Derry/Londonderry for the last meeting and noted her thanks to Ms Fallon for her hospitality at the Spencer House office and the opportunity for the Board to meet with staff.

## 38.23 MATTERS ARISING

- 38.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Actions from the last meeting and all were noted as being complete.

## 39.23 CHAIR & NON-EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

- 39.23.1 **Webinar Conference:** Mrs Loughran noted that members are welcome to attend a webinar entitled *Implementing Integrated Care Systems NI: SHSCT Pilot* on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Those wishing to attend should register.

- 39.23.2 **Post Graduate Qualification:** Mrs Loughran congratulated Mrs Andrew who recently graduated with a Post-Graduate Certificate in Health and Social Care Management.

- 39.23.3 **Meeting of HSC ALB Chairs:** Mrs Loughran referred to a recent meeting of the ALB Chairs with Peter May and highlighted a number of areas discussed.

Mrs Loughran indicated there is hope for a return to Stormont in the autumn. An injection of financial resources is required but the expectations of pay deals within HSC are problematic. In terms of Finances from HM Treasury, all monthly returns will be monitored extremely carefully and organisations must keep within their monthly budget. Mrs Loughran noted that in respect of the Barnett consequentials, Nursing Unions are adamant that any money to support them must be 'new' money. She emphasised that transformation in order to be more productive and more efficient is of high importance.

Mrs Loughran noted as from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 HSC organisations will no longer be authorised to use social workers through Recruitment Agencies.

Mrs Loughran noted the new Chair of Belfast HSC Trust is Ciaran Mulgrew. She indicated that in his introductory speech he referred to the over-emphasis on the acute section of HSC and highlighted that not nearly enough prominence is given to looked after children. Mrs Loughran indicated her agreement and noted she would be writing to Mr Mulgrew in support.

## 40.23 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

### Chief Executive Briefing – Update Report

- 40.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Chief Executive Briefing* and Ms Shaw spoke to her paper highlighted a number of areas for the attention of the Board.

40.23.2 **Financial Situation:** An Allocation Letter for 2023-24 confirming our opening allocation was received. Ms Shaw noted subsequent to this a further letter was received to advise £133,000 has been ringfenced to support the Agency's transformational agenda; these monies are only available if all requirements are met as stated in the letter.

40.23.3 **Workforce:** Ms Shaw advised she met with the Union and was granted a derogation for the consultation process for the Band 7. She confirmed the consultation has been issued along with the Band 8A revised job description and updated Management of Change paper. The Union have requested a one-week extension and Ms Shaw confirmed she has granted this. The consultation process will now close 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 4pm. Three comments have been received to date.

Mrs Loughran noted her gratitude to Ms Shaw for her role in progressing the transformation project and being offered monies to support it.

40.23.3 **Admin and Corporate Review:** Ms Shaw indicated the review did not deliver the clarity intended. Ms Shaw confirmed she has written to all admin and corporate staff and provided the headlines of the report along with the potential opportunities areas which we want to move on. Job descriptions will need to be reviewed but work cannot progress during industrial action. Staff have been asked to liaise with their manager with any areas of interest they might have.

Ms Callaghan referred to the data analyst position and Ms Shaw indicated funds are not available for this at the moment but it is hoped it might be filled inhouse. Work is being carried out examining what BSO covers through the SLA and what is required from administrative staff.

Ms Shaw confirmed she would share the report and what she proposes to do about it at a future meeting when some progress has been made.

40.23.4 **Move to James House:** Ms Shaw indicated she would look towards the autumn to get at a date for an informal event where Mr Smyth, Mrs McGaughey and Mr Reynolds can be invited to visit the new building and receive our gratitude for their work. This occasion would also be an opportunity for the Board to meet staff.

40.23.5 **Performance:** Ms Shaw confirmed the only reason the Agency met break even this year was due to the vacant positions of the Quality Assurance & Training Manager and the Communications Officer being unfilled. Ms Shaw indicated that in respect of the Learning and Improvement need of the Agency, consideration is being given to contacting the HSC Leadership Centre in order to work with the SLT for a few days to establish and coordinate the requirements for a training post. Ms Callaghan noted the Agency must think about what training is required and what is appropriate against a baseline for

training requirements for a Children's Court Guardian; this would be useful for new staff joining the Agency and confirm the professional profile of the Guardian. Mr Douglas confirmed all staff must be NISCC registered and meet the Agency requirements in respect of training; he queried the grade of such a position. Ms Callaghan agreed a stepped approach would be helpful.

### **Business Plan Objectives – Update Report**

- 40.23. Ms Shaw referred to the *Business Plan Objectives – Update Report* which replaces the consolidated action plan going forward. She spoke to her report and highlighted the new format.
- 40.23. Mr Douglas suggested that columns include one for RAG status alongside the action and progress; this will allow for progression to be noted and allow for the Board to review if the action is on target for completion.

## **41.23 FINANCE REPORT**

- 41.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance Report* with an overview of financial management as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023. Mr Brown spoke to the report which was received and confirmed an initial Allocation of £4,800,019, to include a reduction of £17,000 for IFRS16\* and a recurrent saving of £50,000.
- 41.23.2 Mr Brown noted it should be noted that there has been no increase in allocation in real terms to help address the recent increases in “cost of living” which in the 12-months to April 2023 was 8.7%. There is no provision for a staff pay award.
- 41.23.3 Mr Brown advised that for the renaming of the organisation he secured monies in the last financial year to change email addresses, payment and HR systems, etc. this amounted to £32k.
- 41.23.4 Mr Brown confirmed that as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023, the Agency is showing a small underspend of £17k. However, with the costing profile for the year the Agency is currently expecting to breakeven.
- 41.23.5 Mr Wilson queried the costs in respect of the SLA and Mr Brown provided clarity confirming it was only draft at the moment; a more established plan will be available in September. He also queried costs in respect of IT and James House. Mr Brown provided background and clarity of these.
- 41.23.6 Ms Callaghan referred to the budget for staff travel and queried how the budget for this had been set. Mr Brown provided information around this and noted there is an increase in travel and costs. Ms Fallon noted that guardians are

now back to face to face visits with children, meetings and hearings in court. Mrs Loughran suggested the Agency raise with the judiciary about the need for the Guardian to attend court. Ms O'Kane confirmed that there is a live consultation by the Lady Chief Justice at the moment in respect of extending the need for guardians and social workers to attend only in person at the final hearing. The Agency would be supportive of this.

41.23.7 Ms Callaghan referred to absence figures highlighted in red and queried if this was anything the Board should be concerned about. It was confirmed the Agency did have an increase in long term sickness which went outside target over a period of time.

41.23.8 Mrs Loughran thanked Mr Brown for all his work.

## **42.23 ANNUAL REPORT & ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2022-23**

### **Annual Report & Annual Accounts 2022-23**

42.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2022-23* which were approved at an earlier meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee and recommended to the Board. Mr Brown indicated he has updated the report with the proposed amendments from the NI Audit Office and highlighted these to the Board. He referred to comments which have been passed to BSO for clarification; when assurance is received any necessary update will be applied.

42.23.2 The Board approved the *Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2022-23* subject to assurance being received by Mr Brown on the NI Audit Office comments. Mr Brown confirmed he would arrange for submission of the Annual Report and Accounts to the NI Audit Office. He provided clarification of the next steps of the report and certificate by the Comptroller and Auditor General leading to laying at the Assembly.

### **Report to Those Charged with Governance & Letter of Representation**

42.23.3 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Report to Those Charged with Governance and Letter of Representation*. Mr Brown confirmed there were no adjusted misstatements, uncorrected misstatements or irregular expenditure. Ms Shaw endorsed the *Letter of Representation* as Accounting Officer. Mrs Loughran noted the positive report and thanked those involved.

42.23.4 The Board approved the *Report to Those Charged with Governance & Letter of Representation*.

### 43.23 STANDING ORDERS

- 43.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Standing Orders* of the Children's Court Guardian Agency for NI. Mr Brown referred to a number of amendments made, most specifically the change of name of the Agency and the status of the Information Governance Committee which has been stood down as a committee of the Board. The Board approved the amendments to the *Standing Orders*, proposed by Ms Callaghan.

### 44.23 BUSINESS CASE FOR TRANSFORMATION

- 44.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Business Case for Transformation* and Mr Brown spoke to this confirming the business case is in support of the Agency's transformation project and the creation of 6 Band 7 entry level guardians. He noted this has been written based on a 5-case business model, as required by the Department of Health.
- 44.23.2 Ms Callaghan noted the opportunity to recruit Band 7 Guardians is excellent for the Agency. She queried the outcome of the appointments and the effect they have on the waiting list where it has been noted that no more than 40 cases will remain unallocated. Mr Douglas queried if the Board were satisfied this would give the Agency appropriate leverage around case numbers. Consideration must be given to capacity and how sickness trends impact along with the trend of increased workload when staff reduce their hours, retire and resign. Ms Callaghan indicated that a trajectory of waiting list reduction should be plotted over a period of time and submitted as part of our realistic response on this.
- 44.23.3 Following discussion, it was agreed that Ms Shaw along with Ms O'Kane and Ms Fallon would consider the proposed trajectory for the reduction in the number of unallocated cases taking account of the effect of the planned recruitment of Band 7 guardians. The need not to impose an unrealistic target was emphasised.
- 44.23.4 Mrs Loughran thanked Mr Brown for his work on this. Given this is to be submitted quickly, the document will be updated and circulated to Board members for their review on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June. Comments should be returned by Board members by Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July.
- 44.23.5 The Board noted their approval subject to suggested amendments.

**ACTION: Business Case for Transformation to be updated and circulated to Board Members for their response by Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023.**

## 45.23 POLICIES

45.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to two policies reviewed by the Audit & Risk Committee and recommended to the Board for approval.

### **Retire & Return Policy**

45.23.2 The *Retire and Return Policy* is a regional policy which sets out opportunity for people, who have the necessary skill, to retire and work for a period of time as a temporary arrangement. The Board approved the policy for formal adoption by the Agency, proposed by Mr Wilson.

### **Complaints Policy**

45.23.3 The Agency *Complaints Policy* has been revised and streamlined and is now in line with that of BSO. The Board approved the policy for approval, proposed by Mr Douglas.

## 46.23 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

46.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Annual Report of the Audit & Risk Committee* and Mr Wilson confirmed the Head of Internal Audit has provided satisfactory assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control. He indicated limited assurance has been given in respect of the areas of travel, supervision and IT security; management have agreed to the recommendations and will ensure they are implemented in advance of the 6-month review in September 2023.

## 47.23 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SOCIAL CARE GOVERNANCE (SCG) COMMITTEE

47.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Annual Report of the SCG Committee* which the Board noted. Ms Callaghan summarised the work over the year and referred to the integrated SCG Framework and how it links with corporate. She indicated that in terms of learning and improvement, work has been identified and is being taken forward alongside the assurances around that.

## 48.23 BOARD COMMITTEE MEETINGS SINCE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD

48.23.1 Mrs Loughran noted there were three meetings of the Board Committees since the last meeting of the Board.

48.23.2 **Audit & Risk Committee:** A meeting of the *Audit & Risk Committee* took place on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023. Noted.

48.23.3 **Social Care Governance Committee:** A meeting of the SCG Committee took place on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023. The Assurance report reflects the business discussed at the meeting. Noted.

#### **49.23 DEPARTMENTAL / OTHER CORRESPONDENCE**

49.23.1 Mrs Loughran referred to correspondence shared for information purposes: -

- *HSC(F) 22-2023 Charges for Rented Accommodation for HSC Bodies:* The Board noted circular *HSC(F) 22-2023 Charged for Rented Accommodation for HSC Bodies* which was circulated for information purposes.

#### **50.23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

50.23.1 There was no other business for discussion.

#### **51.23 CONFIDENTIAL SECTION**

51.23.1 The confidential minute from the last meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023 was approved. There was no further business for discussion.

Mrs Loughran thanked the Senior Leadership Team for their input and thanked Mrs Andrew for her preparation of the minutes and organisation of the meeting.

**END TIME: 1.30PM**

**DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 7<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023 @ 9.30am**

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**Chair of the Board**

**ACTION LIST**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Progress Noted for Meeting</b>
<b>44.23 Business Case for Transformation</b>	Business Case for Transformation to be updated and circulated to Board Members for their response by Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2023.	Mr Brown	