

**CHILDREN'S COURT GUARDIAN AGENCY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
BOARD MEETING – 27<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2024**

**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:** Ms Patricia O'Kane, Assistant Director  
Ms Sinead Marshall, Children's Court Guardian (*Item 28.24*)  
Ms Lindsay Redpath, Children's Court Guardian (*Item 28.24*)  
Ms Lauren Pearson, Children's Court Guardian (*Item 28.24*)

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

**START TIME: 9.30am**

**28.24 SERVICE DELIVERY**

- 28.24.1 Mrs Loughran welcome Ms Marshall, Ms Redpath and Ms Pearson to the meeting. All three had completed the *Stronger Together Social Worker Leadership Programme* and were today before the Board to deliver their showcase presentations. These reflected on Peer Group Supervision Development, Promoting Staff Wellbeing and Service Improvement Initiative.
- 28.24.2 Mrs Loughran thanked Ms Marshall, Ms Redpath and Ms Pearson for their impressive and inspirational presentations. The Board reiterated their thanks and noted the enthusiasm and leadership skills of each.

**29.24 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

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

**30.24 MINUTE OF THE LAST MEETING**

- 30.24.1 The minute from the last meeting of the Board on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 was reviewed and approved as an accurate record, proposed by Mr Douglas.

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**31.24 MATTERS ARISING**

- 31.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Actions from the last meeting and progress on each was noted.

**32.24 CHAIR AND NON-EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING**

- 32.24.1 **CEO Vacancy / Recruitment:** Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to Board members who were involved in the recruitment process for the position of Chief Executive earlier in the week. She confirmed an appointment had been made. Mrs Loughran also noted her thanks to Ms Marie Roulston whose assistance as external assessor was invaluable.
- 32.24.2 **Achievement:** Mrs Loughran congratulated Mrs Andrew on passing the *Postgraduate Diploma in Health and Social Care Management* with Commendation.
- 32.24.3 **Appraisal of Board Members:** Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to Board Members following recent appraisal meetings. She confirmed these have been forwarded to the Public Appointments Unit, DoH.

**33.24 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING****CEO Briefing/Update Report**

- 33.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Chief Executive Briefing* and Ms Shaw spoke to her paper highlighting some areas for specific mention to:-

**Workload:** Ms Shaw indicated that workload continues to be pressurised with the Agency being unable to keep up with the sheer volume of new cases being received.

**Workforce:** Ms Shaw indicated the Board will be aware of the vacancies within the senior leadership team with the loss of both Assistant Directors and Head of Corporate Services within a 3-month period. She confirmed that Ursula Crickard, new Assistant Director will start with the Agency on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024. Ms Shaw noted the retirement of 3 x Band 8A guardians. Ms O'Kane provided an update and confirmed that following a recent recruitment, 3 full-time Band 8A guardians have been appointed; there is no waiting list to this. She suggested the revised essential criteria have impacted on the number of applications being received. Ms O'Kane indicated that two Band 7 guardians were appointed to the Band 8A

positions. Ms Shaw indicated this endorses a clear career pathway for staff within the Agency.

**Annual Meeting with the Judiciary:** Ms Shaw noted the annual meeting with the Judiciary took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 and they have been made aware of the current changes in the senior leadership team.

**Ground Clearing / Accountability Meeting:** Ms Shaw confirmed the ground clearing meeting has been completed and the End of Year Assurance and Accountability Meeting is planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024.

**Interim Management Arrangements:** Ms Shaw referred to Appendix 1 of her report detailing the draft Interim Management Arrangements. She confirmed that 4 guardian staff meetings have been completed and the interim arrangements and rationale noted. Ms Shaw indicated she met with the Union and discussed the interim arrangements. She confirmed she will have line management responsibility for each of the 4 Guardian Services Managers until September. Ms Shaw indicated that feedback from the Union has suggested a joint staff meeting for all staff. She indicated she was in agreement with this and Mrs Loughran suggested the Board be in attendance to meet with staff, which was agreed unanimously.

- 33.24.2 Ms Callaghan commended Ms Shaw on leading the Agency through a very difficult time. She indicated the Agency has a good plan in place, which is the best that we can achieve in the interim. Mrs Loughran agreed that the last couple of months have been very difficult and the Board doesn't underestimate the pressures on Ms Shaw.

### **Business Plan – Action Plan 2023 - 2024-25**

- 33.24.3 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Business Plan – Action Plan for the period 2023 - 2024-25* and Ms Shaw spoke to the updates providing updated progress. She indicated the action plan will be refreshed for the new 2024-25 year, with some objectives remaining from the previous year.
- 33.24.4 Ms Shaw confirmed the *Business Plan – Action Plan* would be updated with the new objectives for 2024-25, for the September meeting of the Board.

**ACTION: Business Plan – Action Plan to be updated with the new objectives for 2024-25, for the September meeting of the Board.**

## **34.24 FINANCE REPORT**

- 34.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance Report*, as at Month 2 for 2024-25. Ms Shaw indicated that the Agency budget allocation letter has yet to be received. She indicated that information shared by Ms Worth at meeting on the ALB Finance Forum on 30<sup>th</sup> May would indicate a flat cash allocation for 2024-25, which will include the 2023-24 pay award uplift. Ms Shaw noted that there may however be savings requirements during the year due to the overall deficit position of the Health budget which has been widely publicised. Mrs Loughran indicated that if further indications of the impact of financial cuts are required for the year, this would inevitably mean a cut in services/staffing.
- 34.24.2 Ms Shaw noted that the budget is on track in terms of where we would expect to be at this point in the year.

## **35.24 ANNUAL REPORT & ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2023-24 & NIAO REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE**

### **Annual Report & Annual Accounts 2023-24**

- 35.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Annual Report & Annual Accounts 2023-24*. Mr Wilson indicated these had been scrutinised at the Audit & Risk Committee and confirmed the breakeven target has been met. Mr Wilson noted the NI Audit Office has proposed an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. He reflected on the treatment of licence for James House, as he is aware of different organisations being treated differently. He confirmed assurance was sought and provided for accounting purposes in line with FRS16. Mr Wilson noted that the Audit & Risk Committee was happy to recommend the Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2023-24 for approval.
- 35.24.2 The Board approved the Annual Report & Annual Accounts 2023-24.

### **NI Audit Office – Report to Those Charged with Governance**

- 35.24.3 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NI Audit Office – Report to Those Charged with Governance 2023-24*. This was presented by the Audit Office at the last meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee. The Board approved the report.

## 36.24 ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT PLAN

- 36.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to *Annual Engagement Plan 2024-25*. Ms Shaw indicated the plan was shared for approval.
- 36.24.2 The Board approved the *Annual Engagement Plan 2024-25*.

## 37.24 BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

- 37.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Internal Audit Report on Board Effectiveness* and confirmed that *Satisfactory Assurance* was noted. All recommendations were noted and agreed.
- 37.24.2 Mrs Loughran indicated that one recommendation referred to the legal Non-Executive Director vacancy. She confirmed this has been progressed in recent days with meeting with DoH/NI Public Appointments being scheduled for later in July 2024.
- 37.24.3 Mr Wilson referred to the loss of corporate memory, skills and knowledge because of recent staff retirements. He indicated that Internal Audit acknowledged the challenges of SLT at the last Audit & Risk Committee meeting. He suggested a Transition Plan at each Board meeting and Ms Shaw indicated she would include an action plan of the leadership arrangements going forward.

**ACTION: Action Plan on progress on leadership arrangements to be included for the Board going forward.**

## 38.24 RISK REGISTER

- 38.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Risk Register* which now includes risk appetite. Ms Shaw noted she had updated the risks (*Risk 8 & Risk 9*) following on from discussion at the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June. She indicated she would meet separately with Mr Wilson to agree the wording in *Risk 10*.

**ACTION: Ms Shaw and Mr Wilson to meet to discuss wording of Risk 10 on the Risk Register.**

## 39.24 BOARD COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORTS

- 39.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Annual Reports from the Board Committees which were share for information.
- 39.24.2 ***Audit & Risk Committee – Annual Report:*** Mr Wilson referred to the *Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report* providing an overview of the work of the Committee over the past year.
- 39.24.3 ***Social Care Governance (SCG) Committee – Annual Report:*** Ms Callaghan referred to the *SCG Committee Annual Report* providing an overview of the work of the Committee over the past year. She indicated that she would be revisiting the style of reports going forward. The report is to be updated to include Mr Wilson as an attendee of the committee in 2023-24, and the workshop in September 2023.
- 39.24.4 Mrs Loughran thanked everyone for all the work undertaken in the last few months in light of the staffing challenges. She indicated she had attended the pre-meeting with the NI Audit Office, Deloitte and Internal Audit in advance of the last Audit & Risk Committee; she recognised that feedback was very complimentary and the atmosphere very positive.

## 40.24 BOARD COMMITTEES SINCE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD

- 40.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to meetings of the Board Committees since the last meeting of the Board.
- 40.24.2 A meeting of the *Audit & Risk Committee* took place on both 23<sup>rd</sup> May and 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024. All members of the Board had been present at the latter meeting and business undertaken was noted.
- 40.24.3 A meeting of the *SCG Committee* took place on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Business undertaken was noted.

## 41.24 DEPARTMENTAL/OTHER CORRESPONDENCE

- 41.24.1 The Board noted the following correspondence which was shared for information purposes:-
- *HE1/24/142626 - Documentation Requirements/Raising Concerns Policy Reporting and Implementation/NIPSO Case Reporting*
  - *HSC AfC (5) 2004 – AfC Mileage New Regional Rate*

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**42.24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS****Ms O'Kane – Retirement**

- 42.24.1 Mrs Loughran indicated following what has been a challenging couple of months, this was Ms O'Kane's last meeting with the Board before her retirement. She reflected on her contribution to the work of the Agency over the past 26 years and wished her well in this new chapter, Ms Callaghan added her appreciation of Ms O'Kane's openness and character. Mr Douglas noted his good wishes as Ms O'Kane looks forward, leaving a legacy of her commitment to children and young people.

**43.24 CONFIDENTIAL**

- 43.24.1 The Board met in confidential session to discuss the *Domestic Homicide Review* report.

Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to all staff who continue to work hard under challenging circumstances.

**END TIME: 11.25am**

**DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 12<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

## ACTION LIST

Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
20.24 Absence Report	Ms Shaw to seek confirmation with BSO about the timing of the next HSC staff survey.	Ms Shaw	<b>Confirmation sought from BSO</b>
33.24 Business Plan – Action Plan	Business Plan – Action Plan to be updated with the new objectives for 2024-25, for the September meeting of the Board.	Ms Shaw	
37.24 Board Effectiveness	Action Plan on progress on leadership arrangements to be included for the Board going forward.	Ms Shaw	
38.24 Risk Register	Ms Shaw and Mr Wilson to meet to discuss wording of Risk 10 on the Risk Register.	Ms Shaw & Mr Wilson	