

NI GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

BOARD MEETING – 16TH DECEMBER 2021

Present:	Mrs Gemma Loughran, <i>Chair</i> Ms Dawn Shaw, <i>CEO</i> Ms Veronica Callaghan, <i>Non-Executive Director</i> Mr Fred Smyth, <i>Non-Executive Director</i>
In Attendance:	Mr Sean Brown, <i>Corporate Services Manager</i> Ms Teresa Fallon, <i>Assistant Director</i> Miss Patricia O’Kane, <i>Assistant Director</i> Ms Jocelyn Harpur, <i>Principal Consultant, HSC Leadership Centre</i> (87.21)
Apologies:	Mr Lee Wilson, <i>Non-Executive Director</i> Mrs Gillian McGaughey, <i>Non-Executive Director</i>
Minute Taker:	Mrs Ann Andrew, <i>Administration Manager</i>

START TIME: 9.30am

Meeting by zoom

87.21 SERVICE DELIVERY PRESENTATION

- 87.21.1 Mrs Loughran welcomed Ms Jocelyn Harpur, Principal Consultant at the HSC Leadership Centre to the meeting. Ms Harpur provided an overview of the work and process undertaken along with the aims and objectives of the Staff Engagement sessions.
- 87.21.2 Ms Harpur noted that the workshops discussed the challenges in light of the Covid context and what people have achieved. Staff noted their feeling of being vulnerable, external stresses, impact on mental health and challenges around the court processes.
- 87.21.3 Ms Harpur indicated that questions were asked to the Senior Team and a number of themes and current challenges in the service discussed; these have all been captured. The key recommendations of the report have been categorised into three particular areas – Improvement, Culture and Data.
- 87.21.4 Ms Harpur referred to the issues highlighted noting the agreed ‘quick wins’ and those which ‘require planning’. Ms Harpur referred the Board to the Executive Summary, Full Report and Workshop Discussions.

- 87.21.5 Mr Smyth noted this was a very useful presentation and report and the Board were aware of some of the challenges. He agreed with the importance of being transparent and open. He highlighted the legacy attempts at change and the experience of staff.
- 87.21.6 Ms Callaghan acknowledged that some members of SLT have lived through previous efforts/attempts of dealing with difficult issues and capacity to change. She highlighted her concerns and stressed the importance of communication and the need for guardians to contribute towards the ownership and implementation of the professional standards.
- 87.21.7 Ms Callaghan thanked Ms Harpur for the presentation and highlighted that fresh eyes are invaluable. The report was excellent and it was felt the Board should take time out for reflection.
- 87.21.8 Ms Shaw reinforced her thanks to Ms Harpur for her work and agreed that the organisational culture is not at the level where it needs to be. Ms O’Kane noted that the key issues identified are realistic and it was now about taking the key themes and galvanising the majority of staff who are engaged to override the mismatch of accountability.
- 87.21.9 Ms Fallon indicated that the zoom workshops were challenging and covered many difficult areas. The highlighted areas we know exist and it is now about working out how it is best to move forward. She recognised there is good will and it is about how to bring staff along with us.
- 87.21.10 Mr Brown acknowledged the change in environment due to Covid coupled with a high number of established staff members leaving. He noted the report helps to inform us what we want NIGALA as an organisation to be.
- 87.21.11 Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to Ms Harpur not only for input at the Board meeting but for all the work done with the staff. She indicated her report gives the Board confidence about how it should be used to move forward.

88.21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

89.21 MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

- 89.21.1 The minute from the last meeting of the NIGALA Board on 20th October 2021 was approved as an accurate record, proposed by Mr Smyth.

90.21 MATTERS ARISING

- 90.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Action List from the last meeting and the Board noted the progress on the actions detailed.

91.21 CHAIR & NON-EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

- 91.21.1 Mrs Loughran provided an update for Board members in respect of a number of areas and members were also invited to share.
- 91.21.2 **Meeting with Minister of Health:** Mrs Loughran confirmed she had attended a meeting of the HSC Chairs with the Minister of Health. She referred to the statement in the media from the Minister about supporting staff who have encountered hostility in their role. She indicated that some social work staff have been threatened and their names and personal addresses identified on social media. She queried if the Board should be concerned or aware of any intimidation of NIGALA staff; Ms Shaw confirmed there is nothing recent to report although this has happened on a number of prior occasions. Mrs Loughran emphasised the Board's support to staff. Ms Callaghan noted she was hopeful that Sean Holland, Chief Social worker would write directly to social work staff as other administrations have already issues letters of support in light of continuing abusive incidents.
- 91.21.3 **Appraisals:** Mrs Loughran advised all board appraisals have been approved by the Department; she noted she found the individual meetings with members very helpful. Mrs Loughran noted that in her conversation with Ms Shaw a number of areas have been identified for the agenda next year and will include the Workforce Strategy, Supervision, Induction and one 'Staff Group' (not segmented). She emphasised the need to identify the difference between guardians and social workers, consider what makes a good Guardian and how to manifest those qualities, etc. Ms Callaghan indicated she was deeply concerned about the disparity of caseloads and a lack of agreement from some Guardians to look at new cases; she indicated she would welcome a confidential discussion with Board Members about this.

- 91.21.4 **Finance:** Mrs Loughran advised the Minister of Health has now been given the authority to work on the basis of a 3-year finance programme which will assist with planning ahead. She highlighted that Mr Pengelly noted HSC bodies should not be complacent as there are not sufficient monies in the Health budget to allow for all areas of work to be financed as hoped.

92.21 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

Chief Executive Briefing - Update Report

- 92.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *CEO Briefing* and Ms Shaw spoke to her report detailing NIGALA activity since the last meeting of the Board. She highlighted specifically a number of areas for update.
- 92.21.2 **Allocation:** Ms Shaw advised that the number of cases awaiting allocation continues to stay around 50; the three principal practitioners have been assisting with the allocation process and they have reflected on their experiences which are also issues highlighted in Ms Harpur's presentation with regard to accountability, culture and a difficulty in allocating cases to individuals.
- 92.21.3 **Workforce Planning:** Ms Shaw confirmed that SLT will be having a meeting to discuss workforce planning tomorrow. She noted one of the biggest risks the Agency currently has is the lack of a succession plan. The role of the two Assistant Directors is an important role and therefore it would be one of the Agency's biggest risks to lose either individual as they hold such a high knowledge level. Ms Shaw highlighted that that Guardians lack management experience to enable them to apply for the Management role, therefore succession planning should be a priority.
- 92.21.4 **SBNI Case Management Training:** Ms Shaw advised she had attended case management training by SBNI. She indicated that on receipt of the slides from SBNI, an internal training course will be provided for all Guardians.
- 92.21.5 **Meeting with Ms McDaniel:** Ms Shaw indicated she had met with Ms McDaniel and provided an explanation about why monies have been returned to DoH and the ongoing issues with recruitment. She noted she had updated her on the staff engagement workshops and also provided an update on the work that has been undertaken in respect of our data; she indicated this had been a very helpful conversation and is hopeful that some monies might be provided to employ a data analyst for a short period of time to help us improve our data reporting. Ms Shaw confirmed that a case will be submitted seeking funding for this role.

Interim Action Plan

- 92.21.6 Ms Shaw referred to her *Interim Action Plan*. It was agreed that the action plan would also incorporate the action plan from the Staff Engagement Report.

93.21 STAFF ENGAGEMENT REPORT

- 93.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Staff Engagement Report* and also referred to the presentation from Ms Harpur on the staff engagement process, engagement sessions and summary of her report. Ms Shaw circulated for information the *Executive Report, Full Workshop Report* and *SLT Briefing Paper and Action Plan*.
- 93.21.2 Ms Shaw noted SLT have met to look at the actions coming from the Staff Engagement Report by Ms Harpur; based on the findings within the workshops the three areas for action have been categorised under Improvement, Data and Culture.
- 93.21.3 Ms Callaghan queried the view of staff side about the change management programme. Ms Shaw indicated that she would be tabling a proposal at the next meeting of the JNF to talk to them about the results from the staff engagement sessions. She confirmed the report and action plan have not been shared with staff to date. Ms Shaw indicated she was extremely mindful of past change programmes and would seek Board support around this change programme; she felt a confidential Board discussion around this would be helpful.
- 93.21.4 Mrs Loughran noted she was content to have the staff engagement report and report from the workshops shared with all staff. However, the SLT Action Plan should not be shared at this point. She indicated that it might be relevant that a specific meeting with staff side as well as staff would be appropriate; Ms Shaw and Mrs Loughran to discuss.
- 93.21.5 Mr Smyth stressed the importance of being up front about the critical issues and transparent about the change management programme. He highlighted specifically the need to deal with the understanding of accountability to the courts, the Agency and to others, emphasising the need to work collaboratively. He suggested engagement with judiciary also and clarifying our Legal, Statutory and practical working relationships. Ms Shaw and Mrs Loughran indicated they planned to meet with Justice McFarland. Mrs Loughran suggested at the time of the 25th Anniversary of the Agency that perhaps a seminar could be planned which would have input from the Judiciary, Solicitors, Guardians and the Trust.
- 93.21.6 Ms Callaghan referred to the allocation process which she knew was very difficult and queried the caseloads some guardians carry in comparison to others.

93.21.7 Mrs Loughran indicated she would liaise with Ms Shaw about identifying a date for the Board to meet in a confidential workshop in January to discuss the allocation process and identify what can be done about the issues highlighted. Mr Smyth noted it was important to include Mrs Fallon and Ms O’Kane in this meeting and it was a long overdue discussion which needed to get to the heart of a difficult issue and accountability.

93.21.8 It was agreed the SLT Action Plan should not be circulated. The Staff Engagement Report prepared by Ms Harpur should be circulated for information.

ACTION: Staff Engagement Report to be circulated along with the presentation from Ms Harpur.

ACTION: Confidential Board workshop to discuss the allocation process for cases to be scheduled in January 2022.

94.21 FINANCE REPORT

94.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance Report* providing an overview of the finances for the Agency in respect of financial planning for 2021-22, up to 31st October 2021. Mr Brown spoke to same confirming a very tight budget in-year; savings have been made due to Covid which have helped to offset a number of budget areas.

94.21.2 Mr Brown noted that recruitment has been difficult with two recruitment processes for self-employed guardians taking place; two individuals will be joining the Agency next month. He noted an easement of £230k (from ring-fenced monies for Self-Employed Guardians) has been declared to DoH as it cannot be spent on other areas.

94.21.3 Mr Brown noted he was managing the budget closely and was conscious about breaking even. He confirmed that staff will receive a 3% pay rise which will be fully funded by DoH. Mr Brown updated the Board on dilapidation costs which has also been discussed at the Audit & Risk Committee.

94.21.4 Ms Callaghan referred to the move to a 3-year budgeting cycle and emphasised the need to predict planning for a 3-year timescale: consideration will be given to same. Ms Shaw confirmed she welcomed a 3-year financial plan and reinforced the need for workforce planning and reaching the relevant number of guardians to undertake the workload.

94.21.5 Mrs Loughran thanks Mr Brown for his summary on the Agency’s financial position and ongoing work.

95.21 RISK REGISTER

- 95.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Risk Register* and Mr Brown confirmed it was presented at the last Audit & Risk Committee meeting; the meeting looked at risks as they felt there was some duplication and following up they are now content with the register recommending same for approval.
- 95.21.2 Mr Smyth suggested that it would be appropriate that additional controls eg staff engagement sessions and e-training be added to the register.
- 95.21.3 Mrs Loughran noted the Risk Register should also include the risk of the Assistant Director Management structure; SLT are to consider this amendment and circulate for approval. It was suggested that ‘succession planning at all levels including management’ might cover this risk.
- 95.21.4 The Board approved the *Risk Register* subject to the update of the above risks.

ACTION: Risk Register to be updated with additional controls and risks as discussed.

96.21 POLICIES FOR APPROVAL
NIGALA Appraisal Policy

- 96.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Appraisal Policy* and Mrs Fallon spoke to same confirming the Policy is compliant with the BSO Policy and also includes bespoke elements in order to ensure the specific role of the Guardian is addressed through Appraisal; she confirmed the SCG Committee and Audit & Risk Committee have already had sight of the Policy and approved same. Ms Callaghan acknowledged the SCG Committee were content.

The Board approved the *NIGALA Appraisal Policy*.

Workplace Policy on Domestic Abuse

- 96.21.2 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Workplace Policy on Domestic Abuse Policy* which is a regional policy development by BSO and agreed at regional level. The Audit & Risk Committee have already had sight of the Policy and agreed same.

Ms O’Kane indicated that she has engaged with Women’s Aid who will be assisting in the launch of the policy in NIGALA. She noted there is recognition there is now

provision in the legislation around coercive control; secondly the launch of the policy will take into consideration the professional role of the Guardian. She indicated that approximately 90% of cases in NIGALA will be impacted by domestic violence.

The Board approved the *Workplace Policy on Domestic Abuse Policy*.

Menopause at Work Policy

- 96.21.3.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Menopause at Work Policy* which is also a regional policy development by BSO and agreed at regional level. The Audit & Risk Committee have already had sight of the Policy and agreed same.

Ms O’Kane indicated that there was an option of a support group offered to staff but it was decided that 1-1 meetings with Line Managers would be the best way to discuss and seek further support.

The Board approved the *Menopause at Work Policy*.

97.21 QUALITY REPORT

- 97.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Quality Report 2020-21*. Mr Brown confirmed the report, which was agreed via email communication, has been submitted to the DoH who noted the report meets all their requirements.
- 97.21.2 The Board formally approved the *NIGALA Quality Report 2020-21*. Mrs Loughran thanked Mr Brown for preparing same.

98.21 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- 98.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Briefing Paper on Quality Improvement (QI)* and Ms Shaw confirmed her paper was for information purposes and detailed the QI model used across Health and Social Care system. She detailed the QI approach within NIGALA and highlighted how it ties with the staff engagement report and how improvement is working across Health and Social Care in general.
- 98.21.2 Ms Shaw noted the shared guide on *Quality Improvement made Simple by the Health Foundation* was for information purposes.

99.21 BUSINESS PLAN 2022-23

- 99.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Business Plan 2022-23* and Mr Brown gave an overview of the process of preparing a business plan; he noted that DoH have requested the Business Plan for next year be a rollover from this year. Mr Brown noted the plan has had minor updates and is before the Board for approval.
- 99.21.2 Ms Shaw indicated that as last year's plan was rolled over she felt it inappropriate to make major changes. Ms Callaghan queried if we were satisfied the plan would take us through the change process. Ms Shaw emphasised the new Corporate plan will more importantly include key objectives and an improvement programme for taking the Agency forward in the coming years; Mr Smyth noted the importance of the new Corporate Plan being clear about that.
- 99.21.3 Ms Loughran queried if the planning process for the Corporate Plan was underway as yet; Mr Brown indicated he was awaiting the go ahead from DoH. Mrs Loughran suggested the engagement on the Corporate Plan commence as soon as possible. Ms Shaw was in agreement. The Senior Leadership Team will bring forward a programme for the development of the Corporate Plan.
- 99.21.4 The Board agreed the *Business Plan 2022-23*, proposed by Ms Callaghan.

ACTION: Programme for the development of the Corporate Plan to be prepared.

100.21 BOARD COMMITTEE MEETINGS SINCE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD
Audit & Risk Committee – 23rd November 2021

- 100.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Audit & Risk Committee Report* following the last meeting of the committee on 23rd November 2021. Mr Smyth provided an update on the business of the meeting.
- 100.21.2 The status of the Social Care Governance (SCG) and Information Governance (IG) Committees was discussed at the recent Board workshop with David Nicholl. Ms Callaghan reinforced the need for integrated governance and confirmed the SCG Committee will remain as it stands for at least the next 2 years; Business from the Information Governance Committee will be discussed at the Audit & Risk Committee; Mr Smyth agreed that in principle it is appropriate that information governance is discussed here with information risks included on the Risk Register.

- 100.21.3 Ms Loughran indicated that some items on Risk Register may be of specific concern to SCG Committee; Ms Callaghan indicated that all risks should be discussed at the SCG Committee to ensure they are adequately reflected on the Register.
- 100.21.4 Ms Shaw indicated that a number of information governance assurances should come to the SCG committee whilst others will go the Audit and Risk Committee; she indicated she would take this forward with Mr Brown. A piece of work will be carried out to see how staff can be supported around data security; this will be discussed at the Senior Leadership Team meeting.
- 100.21.5 Mr Brown confirmed that as we are approaching year end, information governance assurances will come to the Audit & Risk Committee.

101.21 DEPARTMENTAL/OTHER CORRESPONDENCE

Agenda for Change Pay Arrangements 2021-22

- 101.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the DoH correspondence HSC (AfC) (2) 2021 *Agenda for Change Pay Arrangements 2021-22* and noted same.

Letter to ALBs re Further Extension of Pause on Sponsorship and Governance Activities Financial Year 2021-22

- 101.21.2 Mrs Loughran referred to DOH correspondence RP5972 SSUB-0514-2021 *Letter to ALBs re Further Extension of Pause on Sponsorship and Governance Activities Financial Year 2021-22* and the Board noted the pause on sponsorship and governance activities with minimal end year processes being put in place.

Mrs Loughran referred to the Partnership Agreement and queried if this had been progressed; Ms Shaw indicated she hoped to have early conversations about this in the New Year and agreed to provide an update at the next meeting of the Board.

ACTION: Ms Shaw to provide an update in respect of progress on the Partnership Agreement.

102.21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**Term of Office - Members of the Board**

- 102.21.1 Ms Loughran referred to the term of office for Mr Smyth and Mrs McGaughey which is due to expire in January 2022. She confirmed no further update has been received from Public Appointments Unit in respect of extending the positions for another period of time or on the recruitment of new Board Members. Mr Smyth noted he has not been contacted either but indicated he would be content to extend his term to facilitate the delayed recruitment of new members.

103.21 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

- 103.21.1 The Board updated on confidential business.

Mrs Loughran noted she was conscious of the amount of work being put into preparing papers for the Board Meeting and thanked all concerned. She thanked Ms Andrew for excellent minutes of every Board meeting and emphasised her gratitude for everyone's hard work over the year and wished everyone a Happy Christmas.

END TIME: 12.30pm

DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 24TH FEBRUARY 2022, 9.30AM

Chair of the Board

ACTION LIST

Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
93.21 Staff Engagement Report	<p>Staff Engagement Report to be circulated along with the presentation from Ms Harpur.</p> <p>Confidential Board workshop to discuss the allocation process for cases to be scheduled in January 2022.</p>	<p>Ms Shaw</p> <p>Ms Shaw</p>	
95.21 Risk Register	Risk Register to be updated with additional controls and risks as discussed.	Mr Brown	
99.21 Business Plan 2022-23	Programme for the development of the Corporate Plan to be prepared.	Mr Brown	
101.21.2 Letter to ALBs re Further Extension of Pause on Sponsorship and Governance Activities Financial Year 2021-22	Ms Shaw to provide an update in respect of progress on the Partnership Agreement.	Ms Shaw	