

Title of Meeting	134 th Meeting of the Public Health Agency Board
Date	17 June 2021 at 1.30pm
Venue	12/22 Linenhall Street, Belfast

Present

Mr Andrew Dougal	- Chair (<i>via video link</i>)
Mrs Olive MacLeod	- Interim Chief Executive (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr Rodney Morton	- Director of Nursing and Allied Health Professionals (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr Stephen Wilson	- Interim Director of Operations
Alderman William Ashe	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr John Patrick Clayton	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)
Ms Deepa Mann-Kler	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)
Alderman Paul Porter	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)
Professor Nichola Rooney	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr Joseph Stewart	- Non-Executive Director (<i>via video link</i>)

In Attendance

Dr Aideen Keaney	- Director of Quality Improvement (<i>via video link</i>)
Ms Tracey McCaig	- Interim Director of Finance, HSCB (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr Brendan Whittle	- Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB (<i>via video link</i>)
Mr Robert Graham	- Secretariat

Apologies

Dr Stephen Bergin	- Interim Director of Public Health
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68/21 | Item 1 – Welcome and Apologies

68/21.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Dr Stephen Bergin.

69/21 | Item 2 – Declaration of Interests

69/21.1 The Chair asked if anyone had interests to declare relevant to any items on the agenda. No declarations were made.

70/21 | Item 3 – Minutes of previous meeting held on 20 May 2021

70/21.1 The minutes of the Board meeting held on 20 May 2021 were

APPROVED as an accurate record of that meeting.

71/21 Item 4 – Matters Arising

60/21.1 Data Analysts

71/21.1 The Chair noted in the last minute that there was reference to a shortage of data analysts and he asked if there was any update. The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that there are candidates on a waiting list but PHA is awaiting confirmation of funding. The Chair reiterated a point he had made at previous meetings about the level of funding allocated to contact tracing across the United Kingdom and that Northern Ireland should be receiving 1/35th of that amount.

72/21 Item 11 - PHA Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21 (PHA/03/06/21)

72/21.1 Ms McCaig advised that the draft Annual Report and Accounts had been considered by the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) on 11 June and that Board members had seen a draft before they were submitted to the Northern Ireland Audit Office in May. She said that the GAC was updated on any changes at last week's meeting and that the external auditors had briefed members on progress to date with the audit. She said she was pleased to report that there were no recommendations from the auditors.

72/21.2 Mr Stewart said that the GAC had considered the Annual Report and Accounts in detail and would unanimously recommend them for approval to the Board. He said that, given the year just passed, it was an excellent achievement for Ms McCaig's team and the Executive Directors to achieve a break even position. He noted that there had been a significant reduction in the absenteeism rate, a matter he said he would follow up with Human Resources at a later stage. He surmised that if staff are working under pressure now, the number of such staff may increase further when the situation eases.

72/21.3 Mr Stewart advised that, in terms of the structure of the Report, any issues raised by the Board had been included in the final draft and that although the external audit report to those charged with governance was considered as a draft, no further action was needed in terms of the Annual Report and Accounts. He reiterated his thanks to Ms McCaig and her team and the Executive Directors for compiling the final document.

72/21.4 The Board **APPROVED** the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020/21.

73/21 Item 5 – Chair's Business

73/21.1 The Chair said that his Report focused on two issues, long COVID and addiction to gambling. He said that he had asked for long COVID to be placed on the agenda for today's meeting.

73/21.2 The Chair said that with regard to gambling, there had been a programme on Channel 4 which showed that the growing contribution of the gambling interest to soccer sponsorship which represents a shift from the beer industry. He expressed concern that this will see a surge in the number of problem gamblers, particularly among younger people. He noted that there is a review being undertaken of the Gambling Act. He added that although there is help for older gamblers, he did not feel that there is support for younger gamblers and if this situation continues, there may be mental health consequences for these younger people.

74/21 Item 6 – Chief Executive’s Report

74/21.1 The Interim Chief Executive said that the latest Report provides a lot of information for members on the work of the Agency. She advised that there was a successful campaign in Kilkeel recently to encourage individuals who may have contracted the Delta variant to present themselves for testing and this will be replicated in two other Council areas this weekend through the use of a targeted mailshot. She said that PHA has spoken to the Local Councils and the relevant Trusts to get support from their Chief Executives and will be carrying out a briefing with them next week. She reported that PHA is aiming to buy time to get the vaccination programme completed in order to contain the variant as the number of cases is beginning to increase again in Northern Ireland. She advised that the Kent variant also remains in circulation thus adding to the complexity of the work. Mr Stewart noted that there was good support from elected representatives from right across the political spectrum for PHA’s work in Kilkeel and he hoped that the same support would be forthcoming across other Council areas. The Interim Chief Executive agreed and said that Dr Bergin uses the science to determine where the next outbreaks may occur and that the offers are made to Local Councils for PHA to engage with them.

74/21.2 Ms Mann-Kler thanked the Interim Chief Executive for the Report and asked for an update on the new operating model in terms of a roadmap and timelines, and also for further detail on the equitable vaccine rollout programme. Mr Morton responded and said that with regard to the future operating model, there is a targeted public consultation ongoing on the new planning model. He advised that the HSCB and PHA are having discussions about the interface between the two organisations and there is a programme of work to look at this which should be completed over the next few weeks. He said that it is critical that in the future the new Group and the PHA will have to work in partnership and there should be a multi-disciplinary planning mechanism going forward. He confirmed that as of 1 April 2022 HSCB will no longer exist so there needs to be clarity in terms of how the arrangements for health and social care services across Northern Ireland will work. He said that this planning needs to take account of the new integrated services model which brings together Trusts, general practice and community planning. Mr Wilson added that in terms of the outworking of the Hussey Review, Mr Stephen Murray and he had met with Mr Andrew Dawson from the

Department of Health to consider the first draft of a Project Initiation Document (PID) and after feeding back some comments he is hoping to receive an updated PID shortly and he undertook to share that with members **(Action 1 – Mr Wilson)**.

74/21.3 Mr Morton advised that in terms of the equitable vaccine rollout, there is a monitoring framework which looks at the uptake of the vaccine and as part of this Ms Deirdre Webb and her team have been commissioned to look at areas where the uptake has not been as high and to look at how this could be improved. He said that this is one element of an overarching programme and he said that he could provide more detail on this if required. He advised that PHA is developing bespoke programmes to reach out to specific communities. Mr Clayton said that he would welcome seeing a paper on this **(Action 2 – Mr Morton)**.

74/21.4 Mr Clayton noted that this morning there was media coverage of the first cruise ship arriving into Belfast Harbour this year and that the Chief Executive of Belfast Harbour was keen to point out the involvement of PHA in this area. The Interim Chief Executive advised that Ms Mary Carey had been working on a comprehensive risk assessment with Belfast Harbour to ensure that there is a plan in place. She suggested that Ms Carey could come to a future meeting to talk about the plan. She added that there is an element of risk with all cruise ships coming in and she noted that PHA has undertaken a specific vaccination programme for fishermen **(Action 3 – Interim Chief Executive)**.

74/21.5 The Chair commented that in terms of the screening update, it would be useful to present the update in terms of the percentage of numbers for each programme compared to the same period two years ago so as to determine what advances are being made. The Interim Chief Executive said that she would ask Dr Tracy Owen to do this **(Action 4 – Interim Chief Executive)**.

75/21 Item 7 – Finance Report (PHA/01/06/21)

75/21.1 Ms McCaig said that following the presentation she delivered in April on the overall HSC budget, the budget was consulted on and equality screened and now it is for the PHA to determine its own priorities and how it will fund these. She explained that the Financial Plan being presented today provides information on both revenue and capital spend and highlights assumptions and risks. She noted that at this stage there remain a lot of uncertainties.

75/21.2 Ms McCaig outlined that PHA has received an allocation of just under £105m and there are some other recurrent allocations due giving a total of £121m. She pointed out that in addition to recurrent and non-recurrent allocations, there is a category called assumed recurrent, the risks for which will be managed centrally by the Department of Health. She acknowledged that these present a challenge and will have to be monitored closely. She added that her team will be monitoring these

- over the HSC as a whole.
- 75/21.3 Ms McCaig advised that the next section of the Plan showed the breakdown of the £96.7m of programme expenditure, both Trust and non-Trust, and noted that there is additional information relating to a breakdown of this expenditure in the appendices. She gave an overview of the assumed recurrent funding areas, beginning with service pressures and then areas such as staffing, screening and Transformation.
- 75/21.4 Ms McCaig said that there is £6.3m of funding ring-fenced for COVID-19, primarily to fund the contact tracing service, but also for other elements too. She said that she would work with PHA colleagues in the event that the contact tracing service needs to be scaled up. She reported that PHA's management and administration budget is £24.9m.
- 75/21.5 Ms McCaig explained that PHA was asked by the Department to undertake a baseline review of its revenue budget to determine if there would be any natural slippage and then to consider how this slippage could be used. She suggested that there may be slippage of £800k from the management and administration budget, £1.6m from the £10m allocated to address inescapable pressures and £0.5m from demand-led services. She outlined how PHA could make use of this slippage to fund in-year pressures and priorities including COVID-19, screening, palliative care and HSCQI. She added that PHA would be sharing the outcome of its baseline review with the Department.
- 75/21.6 Ms McCaig listed some assumptions that have been made in preparing this Plan. She advised that there are some areas where funding has been secured but PHA has not received the funds, for example in relation to pay awards. She said that PHA is anticipating receiving an element of the £20m earmarked for safe staffing. She added that further funds may be needed for COVID-19 or for demand-led services and that community and voluntary sector contracts will need to be monitored closely in the event that providers cannot deliver additional activity.
- 75/21.7 Ms McCaig gave an overview of the summary revenue position reiterating that it will be a challenging year and she undertook to keep Board members informed through the monthly reports. She outlined the opening capital position which includes funding for Research and Development.
- 75/21.8 Ms McCaig thanked Mr Wilson and his team for their work in helping to put together this Plan and she recommended it for approval by the Board.
- 75/21.9 Mr Stewart thanked Ms McCaig and said that the Plan was clear and understandable and commended the way in which it was presented. The Chair endorsed Mr Stewart's remarks and conveyed his gratitude to Ms McCaig and her team.

- 75/21.10 Mr Clayton also thanked Ms McCaig for the presentation, but sought clarity on the “assumed recurrent funding”. He asked whether this meant that it is recurrent but that the Department will manage the risk, and if this is the case, does it mean that PHA can recruit additional staff and is able to retain them. Ms McCaig said that she had no issues that the funding will be recurrent, but she suggested that at some stage PHA could be asked to do a savings plan. She added that it would be dependent on any decisions made by the NI Executive following decisions made by HM Treasury. Mr Clayton said that he welcomed the additional funding but felt it was an unusual phrase, hence his reservation. Ms McCaig advised that she had asked the Department for an assurance and had received a memo that said that any assumed allocations are based on what it is normal to expect the Department to resource, so it is a balance risk. However she said that her team would be monitoring this across the whole HSC system.
- 75/21.11 Ms Mann-Kler welcomed the setting out of the context and the breakdown of the programme expenditure, but asked how the determination is made in terms of how much funding is allocated to each area. Ms McCaig suggested that this would have been an appropriate issue to pick up with Mr Séamus Mullen at the last Board meeting but she would look into this (**Action 5 – Ms McCaig**).
- 75/21.12 The Chair noted that each year PHA has an underspend and asked how this could be utilised. Ms McCaig explained that by carrying out the baseline review at this stage, PHA has already identified areas where there could be underspends, but she conceded that over the course of the year, more slippage could arise, and this will have to be managed.
- 75/21.13 Professor Rooney said that it would be helpful for the Board to understand how the funding has been allocated. She asked about the funding for the private sector. Mr Wilson confirmed that some of this would mainly relate to vaccinations and campaigns.
- 75/21.14 Mr Stewart returned to the point made by Ms Mann-Kler and said that the Board should be involved in determining priorities and in submissions that are sent to the Department and that this should be looked at as part of the review of the Assurance Framework. He added that if the Board is to have an influence in terms of where PHA allocates its funding, it should be inputting into these discussions.
- 75/21.15 The Board **APPROVED** the Financial Plan.
- 76/21 Item 8 – Update on COVID-19**
- 76/21.1 The Interim Chief Executive noted that most of the issues relating to COVID-19 had already been discussed. She said that PHA is currently seeking to recruit more contact tracers in anticipation of a further surge of cases and is working with Local Councils.

76/21.2 The Chair noted that the Minister for Health has announced £1m of funding for the treatment of long Covid, but following an announcement by Simon Stevens that there is £100m being allocated in England, this would equate to £3.3 in Northern Ireland. He asked who will be taking the initiative in this work. The Interim Chief Executive advised that Mr Morton's team has commenced work in this area following a request last winter. She explained that once money is allocated to the Trusts, each Trust will make the necessary assessments. Mr Morton added that this assessment service will be carried out through both GPs and secondary care. He noted that there is also a recognition of the psychological impact of long Covid.

77/21 Item 9 - Update from Chair of Governance and Audit Committee (PHA/02/06/21)

77/21.1 Mr Stewart advised that the minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) meeting of 15 April were available for members for noting, and that the Committee had since met on 11 June, principally to consider the Annual Report and Accounts. He said that he was grateful to his colleagues for their contribution to the meeting.

77/21.2 Mr Stewart reported that the Committee considered the Internal Audit report into the Contact Tracing Service and that the audit has received a satisfactory level of assurance. He advised that the Report will come to a future Board meeting, but in the interim he said that there were four recommendations, none of which were of Priority 1 status. He said that the Committee also received the Head of Internal Audit report and noted all audits undertaken during 2020/21 had received a satisfactory level of assurance. He added that the Committee had approved the Internal Audit Charter.

77/21.3 Mr Stewart said that from the Annual Report the Committee had picked up on the issue of reporting about the diversity of the workforce and he would pick this up at a later meeting. He advised that the Committee had received the latest Fraud Liaison Officer Report where there was a couple of data matching issues which were being investigated. He said that the External Audit draft Report to those Charged with Governance was also considered and that PHA had received an unqualified audit opinion, which was an excellent outcome.

77/21.4 Mr Stewart advised that the Committee was pleased to note that the Executive Directors have been regularly reviewing and updating the Corporate Risk Register and it is now seen as a "live" document. He added that at meeting the Committee considers a different directorate risk register and at this meeting the Nursing and AHP directorate was presented. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked Mr Morton for a comprehensive overview of the Register and noted that Mr Morton and Ms Denise Boulter will be conducting a root and branch review. Given this, he felt that perhaps the Committee had considered the Register too early and he would invite Mr Morton back to a future meeting. He said

that the Committee would welcome a review of the wording around the implications of the closure of HSCB on PHA.

77/21.5 Mr Stewart said that a report on the use of Direct Award Contracts (DACs) had been presented and added that PHA had to obtain approval from the Permanent Secretary for the extension of its media contract, and that this contract needed to be re-tendered soon.

77/21.6 The Chair thanked the members of the Committee for their ongoing commitment to its work and their application to detail which is of immense benefit to the PHA Board as a whole.

77/21.7 The Board noted the update from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee.

78/21 Item 10 – Update from Chair of Remuneration Committee

78/21.1 The Chair advised that the Remuneration Committee had met recently and was joined by Mr Robin Arbuthnot from BSO Human Resources. He said that he had asked Mr Arbuthnot for an update in terms of the outworking of the recent surveys undertaken in PHA and had been advised that the PHA Organisational Workforce Development (OWD) group would be re-established to look at the findings of the recent Cultural Assessment Survey and Working from Home survey. He felt that it was important that action plans from surveys are carried through.

78/21.2 The Chair reported that in terms of senior executive pay, pay awards have been made for two of the years that were outstanding, but not as yet for a further two. He expressed a hope that matters relating to senior executive pay could be resolved without the need for legal action. He noted that the amount of money required for PHA to fund the pay awards is a very small part of the overall PHA budget.

78/21.3 The Chair said that there was discussion at the meeting about learning and development for nursing and AHP staff and being able to access public health training.

78/21.4 The Board noted the update from the Chair of the Remuneration Committee.

79/21 Item 12 - PHA Annual Business Plan 2021/22 (PHA/04/06/21)

79/12.1 Mr Wilson advised that the Annual Business Plan was approved by the Executive Directors at their meeting on 8 June and was being brought to the Board today for approval. He explained that the current Corporate Plan runs from 2017 to 2021 but the Department has instructed that this be extended by a further year. He said he was aware that there has been work undertaken on a new Corporate Plan but that will be carried forward into the future so this Business Plan represents the final Business Plan emanating from the current Corporate Plan.

- 79/12.2 Mr Wilson outlined the structure of the Business Plan saying that it looked at three areas; the outcomes within the current Corporate Plan, work under development as part of the new Plan, and the response to COVID-19. He highlighted that one of the actions relating to the work of HSCQI needs to be amended.
- 79/12.3 Ms Mann-Kler thanked Mr Wilson for the draft Plan and said that it is important that PHA has this Plan in place. She asked whether there should be any reference to the Regional Care Framework which was recently announced. She noted that there were references in the Plan to Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) and asked if there would be more rigour in applying that approach this year given there have been ongoing discussions regarding this for the last 2/3 years. Mr Wilson said that within the Operations directorate work has commenced, in conjunction with the other directorates, in developing a new performance management framework. He agreed that there is an issue in terms of how PHA brings greater rigour to this work but conceded that the last year has been frenetic. He said that the reporting to the Board will be tailored appropriately and members will see more detail on this going forward. The Chair commented that it had been 3 years since members undertook the OBA training and that PHA should reaffirm its commitment to that approach. Mr Wilson agreed that it is the way forward (**Action 6 – Mr Wilson**).
- 79/12.4 Mr Clayton noted that the covering paper indicated that individual actions within the Plan would be equality screened as required. He said that given the low uptake in some screening programmes, there should be a target around this in the Plan itself. He commented that, given the one year delay in the development of the Corporate Plan and how there should be a new Programme for Government in place, this Plan could become out of date and asked if there would be an opportunity to revisit it. Mr Wilson said that the equality screening issue could be looked at and he added that the Business Plan is subject to change from time to time and so could be updated if required. However, he noted that even if there were a new Programme for Government any targets within the Programme relating to health and wellbeing would be unlikely to be drastically different from those already in place.
- 79/12.5 The Board **APPROVED** the PHA Business Plan 2021/22.
- 80/21 Item 13 – Corporate Risk Register (PHA/05/06/21)**
- 80/21.1 Mr Wilson noted that Mr Stewart had advised members that the Corporate Risk Register had been considered by the Governance and Audit Committee at its last meeting. He said that this is the Register as at 31 March 2021, but that it is constantly kept under review. He advised that following this last review, one risk, that pertaining to the staff Intranet, was de-escalated to the Operations directorate risk register, and four other risks had their rating reduced from “high” to “medium”.

80/21.2 Mr Clayton asked for more information on the exit strategy referred to in the risk around the recruitment of vaccinators. Mr Morton explained that there are two elements to this, one relates to the redistribution of staff to Trusts and the other relates to staff moving to work in primary care. He said that PHA continues to work with the Department on this matter and is also looking at the requirements for a winter vaccination programme. He advised that he would keep members updated on any issues which may emerge (**Action 7 – Mr Morton**).

80/21.3 The Board **APPROVED** the Corporate Risk Register.

81/21 Item 14 – Any Other Business

81/21.1 The Chair noted that this is the last meeting at which the Interim Chief Executive and the two Non-Executive local Council members would be in attendance.

81/21.2 The Chair said that Mrs MacLeod had agreed to become Interim Chief Executive of the Agency at a critical time and that it was a daunting challenge to take on the role, but one which she did not hesitate to undertake. He added that Mrs MacLeod showed unwavering commitment to the task and worked night and day as well as weekends to deal with the many issues of the pandemic and oversaw the establishment of the Contact Tracing Service which was established at breakneck speed.

81/21.3 The Chair noted that while he and Mrs MacLeod did not always agree on every issue, they maintained a professional working relationship and he commended her ability not to baulk at any decisions that were required to be made. He paid tribute to her contribution to the work of the Agency and wished her well for her retirement.

81/21.4 The Interim Chief Executive thanked the Chair and said that it had been a privilege to work for the Agency. She acknowledged the resilience and adaptability of the staff of the Agency and the willingness to be redeployed when required. She said that working for the Agency has been an honour.

81/21.5 The Chair said that the PHA Board's two longest serving Non-Executive Directors, Alderman Porter and Alderman Ashe are finishing their terms at the end of July and he thanked them for bringing the view of Local Government to the discussions of the Board as this is a critical connection and it is important that public health is embedded in the work of the Councils. He thanked them for their stalwart contributions over the years and he noted that at the last Remuneration Committee, there had been a discussion about them not being approached to share their experiences of being Board members, but he said that he would ensure that he would be speaking to them to get their feedback on their experience before their terms end.

- 81/21.6 Mr Stewart said that he wished to be associated with the Chair's remarks, and he hoped that there would be an opportunity to say farewell in a more fitting manner. Professor Rooney supported that and thanked the Interim Chief Executive for her leadership during this time. He commented that it was unusual that the Chair of the PHA Board was not on the selection panel for the new Board members.
- 81/21.7 Alderman Ashe, on behalf of himself and Alderman Porter, thanked the Interim Chief Executive for her work and wished her well for her retirement and said that she brought a great deal of expertise to the Agency. He said that Alderman Porter and he had enjoyed their time on the Board and that it had been a learning curve from the outset. He added that if there were one failing that the Agency had, it is that it does not sing its own praises enough. He noted that over the years PHA staff have been asked to step up where needed and face the music. He finished by saying that everyone has to value their time more.
- 81/21.8 The Chair drew the meeting to a close.

82/21 Item 15 – Details of Next Meeting

Thursday 19 August 2021 at 1:30pm

Fifth Floor Meeting Room, 12/22 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 7ES

Signed by Chair:



Date: 19 August 2021