

**MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING**  
**Thursday 11 April 2024**  
**Conference Room, Rathgael House**

**Attendees:**

Mark Browne (Chair)  
Ronnie Armour  
Faustina Graham  
James Hutchinson  
Paul Corrigan  
Neil Palmer  
Andrew Scott  
Ann Moore  
Colin Daysh (DoF) (Item 3)  
Peter Hutchinson (Item 4)  
Kathryn Menary (Item 4)

**Apologies:**

Heather Cousins  
Linsey Farrell  
Marcella Phillips

**In attendance:**

Bryan Laverty (Board Secretary)  
Catherine Service

**Overview of Digital Operations (including IT Assist Service Portfolio)**

Colin Daysh, DoF Director of Digital Operations, provided a presentation of Digital Operations, including the IT Assist Service portfolio.

He provided an overview of:

- Digital, Security & Finance Shared Services; and
- Digital Operations.

The Board thanked Colin for his presentation and agreed that it will be important for the relevant officials to maintain a close relationship with Digital Operations going forward.

**Review of School Improvement**

Peter spoke to his paper which provided the DE Board with an update on the End to End Review of School Improvement which offers the opportunity to refresh the Department's focus on school improvement and to ensure alignment across a range of key policy areas with the objective of driving improvement and raising standards with the fundamental aim of delivering positive outcomes for children and young people.

Peter explained the background to the Review, the key issues for the Review to address and explained that the aim is to set out the way forward and to go to consultation in March 2025, with delivery in a number of areas taking place in the meantime.

The Board discussed the key deliverables for the next six months including clarification on roles and support; data gathering; and better use of school development plans.

The Board agreed that key issues going forward include:

- The need to explain clearly what the model will look like and how it will operate;
- How resources will be redirected to achieve this;
- A cultural shift within key partners;
- How the Review will dovetail with the End to End Review of SEN.

### **Risk Management**

Andrew presented his paper which provided the Board with an update on risk management in the Department since the previous Board, presented the opening CRR for 2024/25, and an update Risk Management Framework (RMF).

The Board:

- approved the latest amendments to the CRR, representing the 2024-25 opening position;
- noted the Department's current risk profile;
- approved the updated RMF; and
- agreed to the CRR and RMF being shared with the Minister and our ALBs.

### **DE 2023/24 Business Plan (end year report)**

Andrew presented his paper which provided the Board with the end-year position against actions and performance measures contained within the 2023/24 DE Business Plan, and outlined a number of insights, key positives and areas to consider.

The Board

- advised that it is content with the ratings and comments provided in relation to the 2023/24 Business Plan end-year report and the summary position of actions up to 31 March 2024;
- noted the position in relation to PMs at the end-year stage;
- agreed that the end-year report is shared with the Minister, published on the Department's website and the Assembly's Committee for Education informed; and
- noted the position regarding NDPB 2023/24 Business Plan end-year reports.

## **DE 2024/25 Business Plan**

Andrew presented his paper which provided the Board with a final draft 2024/25 Business Plan for consideration and agreement.

The Board:

- Agreed the DE 2024-25 Business Plan, noting that the Plan may be subject to change at a meeting of the SMT this coming Tuesday; and
- Noted the update regarding ALB 2024-25 Business Plans.

## **Finance Director Report**

Neil provided members with an update on the current key financial issues, including:

- The outcome for the Department of the Executive paper referred to at the Board meeting in February;
- The 2024/25 opening position;
- The 2023/24 Capital budget; and
- The agreement of the Executive that £150m will be allocated to take forward the Strule Shared Education Campus project in the coming three-year period. The programme is still subject to Full Business Case approval.

Neil updated the Board on:

- Earmarked budgets;
- Annual reports and accounts;
- High Risk EA IT projects; and
- Prompt payments.

## **Update from ARAC Meeting**

Paul advised that ARAC at its meeting on 13 March 2024 received updates on and discussed:

- Strule
- NIAO updates;
- Internal Audit Progress Report;
- Internal Audit Strategy 2024/25;
- Fraud and whistleblowing;
- Finance;
- Risk Management;
- GAR meetings; and
- Governance Statement.

## **HR Report**

Ann updated the Board on the HR Report provided in advance of the meeting.

Ann reported the following on resourcing:

- A new AO competition will launch in Q1
- A new G7 competition will launch late Q1
- A G6 competition will launch Q2.

TMG has approved a number of additional vacancies and NICSHR Business Partners will work with DE to address these.

No red flags have been identified in NISRA's absence report for 2023/24 Q3&Q4. Anxiety and stress remain the key issues.

A message will issue to all staff in DE regarding the need to adhere to the requirement to undertake return to work interviews within two days.

## **DE People Plan (verbal update)**

Andrew advised that the Staff Engagement Forum is currently being reconstituted, with a first meeting planned for later in April. Officials will work with the Forum on the preparation of a DE People Plan which will be brought to the Board later in the year for approval.

## **Non Departmental Public Bodies**

Mark advised that:

- Richard Pengelly will take up his secondment as Chief Executive of the EA on Monday 15 April; and
- Together with Ronnie and Linsey he had attended a recent CCMS Council meeting where they had a useful and productive discussion.

James advised that the competition for a new NICIE Chief Executive is ongoing.