

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Monday 13 September 2021
(videoconference)

Present:

Mrs Deirdre Fulton, Interim Chairing Member (ICM)
Ms Neelam Bakshi
The Hon. Lord Minginish
Professor Stephen Tierney
Sheriff David Young, QC

Mrs Liz Burnley, CBE
Ms Morag Ross, QC
The Hon. Lady Wise, QC

In attendance:

Heather Tully, Interim Chief Executive (CE)
Sarah Webster, Appointments Manager
Stuart Scott, Appointments Manager
Andrew Cairns, Business Support Officer
Sandip Mahajan, Appointments Manager

Apologies:

Sheriff Principal Marysia Lewis

1. Welcome & Apologies / Declarations of Interest

1.1 The Interim Chairing Member (ICM) welcomed Members and introduced Heather Tully, who would be acting as the Interim Chief Executive for the foreseeable future. Ms Bakshi made her standing declaration in relation to Social Security Tribunals.

2. Consent Agenda Items

2.1 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Note - actions from this meeting are for the Business Management Unit (BMU) to progress unless stated otherwise.

2.1.1 The minutes were approved.

2.1.2 Ms Bakshi reported that her renewal (until 2024) as a Board member had now been formally announced, and that her profile on the JABS website should be updated accordingly. It was agreed that members' profiles on the site would be checked.

BMU Action (1) - to consult Ms Bakshi for information and to update member profiles on the JABS website.

2.1.3 The ICM reviewed actions from the previous meeting and explained that some had been delayed due to various factors. The Business Management Unit (BMU) was responsible for progressing actions unless stated otherwise. Following a question on feedback on BMU Action 12, the ICM reported that SG had indicated the 2021 review (of JABS) should be able to go forward as a non-competitive action. It was noted that the brief should be checked in case it needed revision, should there be any dependency in the brief on in-house work by JABS which was being deprioritised and was not currently programmed.

BMU Action (2) - to set up a distinct folder on Huddle, which Board members can access, containing up-to-versions (masters) of the pipeline and programme plans.

2.2 Chief Executive Report

2.2.1 The CE reported that there had been no substantial change to return to office guidance since the August meeting update. SG was promoting working from home as the ongoing default option and expected non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) to adhere to this policy. Some JABS staff had started working in the office on a limited basis. The CE anticipated that the first interviews that could potentially be conducted in the office would be the ones around March 2022 (LTC members, Sheriff Principal) so planning could provisionally take place on that basis. The Board discussed the need for a hybrid model, and this would be reviewed as appropriate.

3. Interim Chairing Member (ICM)

3.1 ICM Update

3.1.1 Given ongoing resource pressures, the Board will be considering its operating model to best manage future demand. The Board agreed to continue making best use of all available resources including lay assistants.

3.1.2 The Board discussed the need for a clear quorum policy for Board decisions. They agreed that there needed to be a protocol for urgent decisions, and other decisions made electronically outwith Board meetings, and it was agreed a Board protocols paper would be drafted for the October meeting. It was noted that some decisions may be required sooner to deliver core business.

BMU Action (3) - to draft a paper on Board protocols for urgent/other decision-making and an effective quorum policy, for consideration at the October Board meeting.

4. Priority Plans

4.1 Sheriff Principal Competition/s

4.1.1 The Board is anticipating running a Sheriff Principal competition in 2022 and competition plans are being developed.

4.2 Local Taxation Chamber (replacing Valuation Appeal Committee) for President and Members

4.2.1 Following the advert and process for the Local Taxation Chamber (LTC) President, the Board was not making a recommendation for appointment. In response to a request from Judicial Office, it was agreed that a competition would be re-run with minor adjustments to existing material, which was at an advanced stage, and that it was likely to be the same panel (TBC). The BMU would review the Programme Plan concerning LTC exercises and inform the Board, who would sign-off (by email) the refreshed application pack and associated timings. It was anticipated that this would take place in the last calendar quarter of 2021. It had been clarified to the Valuation Appeal Committee (members and secretaries) that there would be no automatic transfer over to the LTC.

4.2.2 Although the Board agreed that securing the LTC President took priority over the LTC members recruitment, careful and prompt review of the Programme Plan would be needed by the BMU to consider how LTC President recruitment could be accommodated in the timetable, and what impact this might have on other competitions.

BMU Action (4) - BMU to review the Programme Plan and propose best timings for the LTC President and Member exercises and inform the Board.

4.3 Board Priorities (September to December 2021)

4.3.1 The Board were informed of the priorities which the Chair considered could, pragmatically, be taken forward for the next quarter, and the need to consider longer-term strategic planning. It was noted that, in determining its priorities, the Board also needed to be clear on where this resulted in strands of work being postponed or otherwise deprioritised. Members' general availability was also discussed within the planning content and options for how best to capture their current availability going forward.

5. Feedback to applicants

5.1.1 Following discussion in PT Shrieval round panels on adopting a consistent approach to feedback, it was agreed that the existing feedback policy approach, trialled earlier in the year, be used for the ongoing part-time shrieval rounds, and for the foreseeable future for shrieval rounds. Lay assistant support would be sought again.

6. Any other business

6.1.1 The Board discussed having another annual meeting with the Sheriff Principals group to hear their reflections, and would seek to arrange this for early 2022.

BMU Action (5) - set up another annual (feedback) meeting with the Sheriff Principals group for early 2022.

7. Close

7.1 The meeting closed at 10.35.