



Minutes of the VSS Board Meeting No 52
Maldron Hotel, Cotton Suite, Brunswick Street, Belfast
Board Meeting Type: Quarter End Review
23 October 2018 at 9:30am

Board Members Present:

Oliver Wilkinson (OW)	Board Member (Chair)
Patricia Haren (PH)	Board Member
Bertha McDougall (BMcD)	Board Member
Stephen McIlveen (SMcI)	Board Member
Richard Solomon (RS)	Board Member
Beverley Clarke (BC)	Board Member

VSS Officers in Attendance:

Margaret Bateson (MB)	Accounting Officer and CEO
Andrew Walker (AW)	Head of Corporate Services
Joanne McConville (JMCC)	Head of Health & Wellbeing
Maria McKeown (MMcK)	Executive Co-ordinator (Minutes)

Others in Attendance:

Gareth Johnston (GJ)	Director of Equality, Victims, Human Rights and Delivering Social Change (TEO)
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OW welcomed and introduced GJ to the VSS Board. GJ is the newly appointed Director of Equality, Victims, Human Rights and Delivering Social Change at The Executive Office. The Chair requested all in attendance to introduce themselves to GJ outlining their role within the VSS.

GJ introduced himself giving details of his background and previous roles within the Civil Service some of which include: Head of Justice Strategy division, (DOJ) Head of Criminal Justice policy division (NIO). GJ has also been involved in community development and overseas aid.

GJ outlined key priorities for the TEO some of which include developing a new strategy for Victims and Survivors. Ensuring that should the proposed legacy institutions progress, they utilise and work in partnership with existing stakeholders and do not start from scratch.

Current challenges faced by the TEO is Brexit and the uncertainty that brings, alongside no devolved executive in Northern Ireland.

GJ finished by reassuring the VSS Board that TEO are here to assist the VSS and will continue to build on the good working relationships that already exist.

A Apologies

No apologies to note.

B Minutes of Previous Meetings

B1 Minor changes to be made to the minutes from the meeting 13.9.18. MMcK to circulate to the Board via email for approval.

C Action Points

The Board asked the Head of Corporate Services to provide an update in relation to the outstanding action points.

The Board noted two action points AP1 and AP2 are now closed.
One action point remains open.

MSFM 4.4.3: Ministers to meet Board. This action point is now on hold.

D Conflict of Interest

D1 The Board reviewed the Supplier List.

D2 No conflicts of interest were declared.

E Chairman's Report

The Chairman provided the board with details on the events he attended in the last quarter, highlighting the meeting with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the ELY Legacy Consultation event.

It was noted that John Beggs, Secretary to the Commission for Victims and Survivors has left his position for a new post. The VSS appreciates the hard work John has provided during his time at CVS and wishes him well for the future.

GJ left the meeting.

F Quarter End September 2018

F1 CEO/AO Exception Report

The Board asked the CEO to present this report.

The Board noted The NI Public Services Ombudsman has completed her report relating to a complaint from an individual relating to unacceptable and threatening behaviour.

The report found that the VSS had made no false allegations in relation to the unacceptable and threatening behaviour by the individual.

The report however found maladministration in three areas:

- The failure to obtain a report from a member of staff in relation to a client's behaviour.

This was a procedural matter which the Ombudsman did not find any injustice suffered by the client in respect of this issue.

- The failure to conduct a fair investigation of the client's complaint.

This related to the Board decision not to meet with the individual face to face.

- The failure to give adequate reasons for decisions and clear and complete information to the client.

NIPSO did not accept the list (presented as an Annex in a letter to the individual) was sufficient.

It is also important to note the context within which this took place, with a significant number of interactions taking place over a sustained period of time.

Notwithstanding, the VSS has implemented the recommendation from NIPSO.

The Board discussed reviewing the complaints review process. It was agreed the Health and Wellbeing Committee will review the complaints policy and submit proposals for improvement to the VSS Board.

AP1 Health and Wellbeing Committee to review complaints review process and submit proposals for improvement at the next VSS Board meeting.

MB provided an update on the Strategic risk register.

One new risk has been added STG46 – Risks associated with maintenance of VSS Board and Committees in absence of Ministers (potential inability to appoint members, or to enact term extension).

Two risks coming from quarter one have been closed in this quarter.

STG 40 - Industrial Tribunal did not take place as claimant withdrew the claim.

STG44 - A number of Key Staff posts have been filled with permanent appointments, specifically the Head of Health of Wellbeing, Health and Wellbeing Programme and Finance and Governance Manager.

AP2 VSS Chair requested the Board to be furnished with the latest Organisational Chart at the next Board meeting.

F2 Quarterly ALB Performance Report

MB presented this report to the Board.

The VSS is on target and expects to meet their 31 Business targets.

MB noted concerns in reaching the target for Education and Training as uptake has been low. The Case Managers are proactively seeking to identify needs in these areas, i.e numeracy and literacy, physical activity and volunteering.

The board noted the strategic risk register includes one red risk STG43 – Risk of cashflow difficulties in the final 12 months of the PEACE IV project, given the requirement for all advance funding provided by SEUPB to be fully offset against claims 6 months prior to the project end date. The remaining 4 amber risks were also noted.

In relation to Financial Management it was noted 4k(Capital) identified as an inescapable commitment relating to the final costs of the new Management Information System. A bid for this has been placed in the October 18 monitoring round.

The board noted the levels of sick absence in the last quarter and the reasons for this.

F3 Quarterly Assurance Statement

MB updated the Board on the outcome of the most recent spot check for 18/19. From 540 Individuals there were merely two anomalies. One client was identified as ineligible and another the VSS was unsuccessful in contacting.

F4 Quarterly Outcomes Based M&E

The Board noted this paper.

AP3 The Board requested that their next strategic session focuses on the work that is carried out by the advocacy support workers.

MB left the meeting.

The Board discussed the potential reputational risk to VSS in relation to work carried out by advocacy support workers. The position is clear that VSS funds the salary costs for these posts only. VSS does not recommend law firms for individuals to use.

G Board Sub Committees

G1 Audit and Risk Committee – Annual Report 2017/18

The Head of Corporate Services provided the Board with an update from the recent ARC meeting on 18 October.

The Head of Health and Wellbeing provided the Board with an update from the last Health and Wellbeing Committee meeting.

Additional safeguarding training will be provided for new staff members and Board members.

The Board requested if there was an update on AP2 from meeting on 6th August 2018. JMcC to follow up with the CEO. The board will be kept updated.

H Board Workplan and Development

H1 Board Attendance / Work Plan

The Board asked the Head of Corporate Services to provide an update on Board Attendance and Work Plan.

The Board noted this paper.

H2 Board Training Update and Questionnaire

The Board asked the Head of Corporate Services to present this report.

The Head of Corporate Services reminded members of the availability of time within the Board Work Plan for appropriate training to be undertaken.

The Board identified that they should undertake adult safeguarding training specifically for VSS.

AP5 VSS to arrange adult safeguarding training for the VSS Board.

H3 Board Self-Assessment Update

The Board asked the Head of Corporate Services to present this update.

The Board noted the action arising in relation to feedback being provide to the board following the outcome of the Victims Choice Quality Mark is now closed.

The remaining action arising, Post evaluation review of first year service delivery approach to be provided to the Board in the strategic Board session in December 2018.

I Standing Agenda Items

I1 Compliance Update (Tabled)

The Board asked Head of Corporate Services to present this paper.

There are now 7 suspected fraud cases which remain open as at 30 September 2018. 3 cases have been closed by FIOG, subject to receipt of VSS responses to recommendations.

In relation to outstanding debt, no further response has been received and no vouching has been possible, VSS have now made a request to TEO for a write off of this balance in October 2018.

AW outlined the lessons learned from this case and the processes now in place that will limit this situation from reoccurring.

One whistleblowing case emerged in the quarter ended 30 June 2018. An anonymous whistleblower made accusations of client fraud. Preliminary investigation by VSS found no case to answer in this matter and the matter was formally closed in quarter ended 30 September 2018.

There were no new Ombudsman Complaints made in the period to 30 September 2018. One ongoing case ref COM1718/02 has concluded in quarter ended 30th September 2018. Full details were provide to the Board earlier as part of the CEO Exceptions Report.

There were 2 FoI Requests received in the quarter to 30 June 2018. Both requests are closed at 30 September 2018.

There were no complaints received in the quarter ending September 2018.

The Board noted that the NI Direct contract ended on 30 September 2018. Call handling is now being managed in house. The call volume is currently manageable and the client services team are able to handle client queries directly improving our service delivery to Victims and Survivors.

I2 Complaints and Appeals (Tabled)

The Board noted that there were no complaints to be considered at Board level.

I3 Client Risk Update

The Board asked the Head of Health and Wellbeing to present this report.

There is no new incidents to report in terms of unacceptable client behaviour. There is currently no members of the public listed on the Unacceptable Behaviour Register.

During Quarter 2, one client were added to the Client Risk Register. The total number of individuals that VSS has listed on the register from April 2018 to date is 9. All cases to date are closed. 6 incidents relate to the same client who is receiving ongoing help and support.

14 Data Protection Update

The Board noted there were no breaches to report in terms of GDPR and data protection.

VSS has requested the Data sharing agreements from the remaining groups.

VSS received The Executive's Office data sharing agreement on 22 October 2018.

K Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday 20 November 2018 at 10:00am at Seatem House.