



Minutes of the VSS Board Meeting No 59

VSS, Seatem House, 28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast

Board Meeting Type: Quarter End Review

Thursday 2 May 2019 at 9:30am

Board Members Present:

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

VSS Officers in Attendance:

Margaret Bateson (MB)	Accounting Officer and CEO
Andrew Walker (AW)	Head of Corporate Services
Lizzy Graham (LG)	Governance Officer (Minutes)

A Apologies

Apologies were received from Stephen McIlveen.

B Minutes of Previous Meeting

B1 The minutes of the Annual Review meeting held on 28 March 2019 were approved.

C Action Points

The Board noted the three open action points, one of which has *red* status:

MSFM Ref 4.4.3: Ministers shall meet with the Board formally each year. A request was sent and meeting had been scheduled. This remains on hold in absence of Ministers.

D Conflict of Interest

D1 The Board reviewed the Supplier List.

D2 No conflicts of interest for matters arising on the meeting agenda were declared.

LG collected a completed Declaration of Interest form from all Board members for the 2019/20 year.

E Chairman's Report

The Chairman provided the Board with details of events he had attended during the quarter, also highlighting his meeting with Gareth Johnston of TEO.

F Quarter End March 2019

F1 CEO/AO Exception Report

The Board asked the CEO to present this report.

MB provided the Board with an update regarding the VSS response to the most recent CVS Victim and Survivors Pension Arrangement Advice paper. The Board discussed the possible implications for VSS schemes should a Victim and Survivor Pension be agreed. The Board also raised some queries around how a Pension may operate – for example *whether a pension will be available for a grandchild carer, and the situation in respect of Army/Police personnel (unclear as to the circumstances in which a War Pension applied)*.

The Board noted that progress against two Delivery Plan targets was less than expected for the 2018/19 year, however these are PEACE IV areas where the overall targets are set for the project lifetime, rather than for individual financial years. Significant progress expected in these areas in 19/20, and outcomes in respect of the 18/19 activity have been very good.

MB advised the Board that the implementation of Phase 1 of the RTN has been delayed until September 2019. In addition, the Board noted a number of key risks and challenges which have been flagged to the RTN Management Team by the VSS.

The Board noted that there have been a large number of queries from SEUPB regarding the VSS bid for additional funding. A decision on the application is now expected by October 2019.

The Board were advised of a whistleblowing concern and governance review ongoing within two funded organisations. Broad details were discussed and Board will be updated following outcomes of ongoing investigation and corporate governance

review. One aspect associated with one of these issues is the use of social media by funded organisations. The Board noted the recent work undertaken to update the VSS Guidance Note on Social Media, and recommended that this be concluded and published asap.

AP1 – VSS to update and issue revised Social Media Policy

F2 Quarterly ALB Performance Report

The Board asked the CEO to present this report.

MB drew attention to the four new risks added to the risk register.

AW provided an update on risk **STG49** regarding the ongoing INP spot checks. The Board noted the increase in incoming calls arising whilst the spot check completes, and the resulting impact on the work load within client services.

The Board discussed risk **STG50** in respect of Board numbers, and noted that MB/AW would be raising this with TEO at next week's Accountability Meeting.

The Board noted the current VSS budgetary position.

F3 Quarterly Assurance Statement

The Board noted this paper.

F4 Quarterly Outcomes Based M&E

The Board noted this paper.

G Board Sub Committees

G1 Audit and Risk Committee Update

The Head of Corporate Services provided the Board with an update from the most recent ARC meeting, held on 17 April 2019.

The Board noted that three Internal Audit reports were presented to the ARC, all of which received a **satisfactory** assurance rating. An annual assurance report had also been issued with a **satisfactory** rating.

It was also noted that Internal Audit and NIAO presented their audit plans for 2019/20, both of which were accepted by the ARC. The Internal Audit plan included some changes to areas of audit, to more appropriately align audit work with areas of risk – as agreed by management, internal audit and the Committee.

G2 Health and Wellbeing Committee Update

BC provided the Board with an update from the most recent Health and Wellbeing Committee meeting.

The Board noted that a fixed Agenda structure had been agreed. It was also noted that the Safeguarding Policy was under review and that all Board members are to receive safeguarding training. In addition, a Serious Adverse Incident Policy is under development and due to be finalised and issued.

It was noted that the HWB Committee is due to agree dates for all 2019/20 meetings.

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.

OW drew attention to the Board Objectives for 2019/20, advising that the agreed objectives should be included in Board members' performance appraisals for 2019/20. AW provided further advice and guidance on the appraisal process

AP2 – *AW to circulate Annex 2, Annex 4 and template Appraisal Forms to Board members, and to include CVS research projects under point 6 of Annex 4 VSS Board Objectives 2019/20.*

AP3 – *Chair to arrange completion of all member appraisals and forward completed appraisal documentation to Head of Corporate Services.*

H2 Board Training Update and Questionnaire

The Board noted this paper including a number of proposed training opportunities.

H3 Board Self-Assessment Update

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

It was noted that five actions had been identified from the 2018/19 Self-Assessment to be taken forward by the Board.

The following comments were applied to the relevant action points:

AP1. *Board numbers – Added to risk register and to raise with TEO*

AP2. *Maintenance of Standards - Report to be presented to HWB Committee*

AP3. *Small groups coming together – PEACE proposal includes provision for a social support officer which will include working with smaller funded*

organisations, particularly around evaluation. Noted however that small groups do generally engage well with Victims Practitioner Working Groups.

AP4. *Oversight of Comms Plan - Implementation of VSS Communications Plan to be added to the Agenda.*

AP5. *New Code of Conduct (Sponsor Departments and ALBs) - To be discussed with TEO at next Accountability Meeting.*

I Standing Agenda Items

I1 Compliance Update (Tabled)

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

The board noted the three suspected fraud cases open at the 31 March. The VSS continues to pursue the five remaining debtor balances which arose from closed suspected fraud cases but may move to write off those which the VSS is unable to recover.

It was noted that the one ongoing whistleblowing case and one ongoing governance review were discussed during the CEO Exception Report.

There were no new Ombudsman Complaints or Assembly Questions received during the quarter. It was noted that three FoI requests were received during the quarter with a further one received since quarter end. All requests have been submitted by the same individual.

There were no complaints about VSS received in the quarter ending 31 March 2019. There are currently five open complaints in respect of VSS Funded Organisations. One complaint which was rejected by VSS has been appealed. Two Board members were appointed to review the appeal.

I3 Client Risk Update

The Board noted this paper.

AW advised that no new clients have been added to the Unacceptable Behaviour Register or the Client Risk Register during the period.

I4 Data Protection Update

It was noted that three data breaches occurred during the period. All were deemed to be low risk and did not require reporting to the ICO. Both were as a result of human error and no personal or sensitive information was compromised.

A discussion was held on options such as software which may be useful in helping staff to avoid errors when sending external e-mails etc.

The Board noted that the VSS is working to improve internal processes to limit the number of occurrences.

J Any Other Business

J1 Board Code of Conduct

This paper was noted and approved by the Board.

J2 HH Award 2019/20

The Board discussed a number of potential changes to the current Home Heating Award eligibility criteria.

K Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for Tuesday 21 May 2019 at 10:00am at Seatem House.