



## **Minutes of the VSS Board Meeting No 68**

### **Board Meeting Type: Year-end Board Meeting**

**Tuesday 31st March 2020 at 10:00am**

**Remote – via Zoom Online**

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#### **Board Members Present:**

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

#### **VSS Officers in Attendance:**

Margaret Bateson (MB)	Chief Executive Officer
Andrew Walker (AW)	Head of Health and Wellbeing (redeployed)
Tara Lewsley (TL)	Acting Head of Corporate Services
Melissa McCartan (MM)	Business Support Officer (minutes)

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#### **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

#### **A Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the video conference call, highlighting the current circumstances in relation to Covid-19 (Coronavirus).

## **B Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 18 February 2020 were approved.

## **C COVID-19 – VSS Contingency Plan**

### **VSS Staff Health and Wellbeing Guide**

MB provided the Board with an update in relation to the VSS Staff Health and Wellbeing Guide: Working from Home during Covid-19. It was noted that this document along with the VSS Lone Working Policy was circulated to all VSS staff to support their safety and health and wellbeing whilst working from home for the foreseeable future.

### **Covid-19 Resource Guide – Individual Needs Programme and Needs Based Frameworks**

MB advised that VSS continues to monitor information from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UK and Irish government advice. It was noted that all current guides have been prepared based on the most recent advice and relate specifically to support and services provided within the Health and Wellbeing Caseworker Network to victims and survivors through INP and PEACE IV.

MB advised that all cheques and online payments to victims and survivors in receipt of support via the Self-Directed Assistance Scheme will be issued on or before 1 April 2020. It was noted that this has been brought forward compared to previous years in order to assist and provide support to individuals during this time.

It was noted that the FAQ section on the VSS website has been updated following the COVID-19 outbreak and will continue to be updated to keep individuals informed and help victims and survivors through this difficult time. MB advised that an online chat service is due to go live on the VSS website within the next few days. This will be another platform for victims and survivors to get in contact with a VSS staff member during working hours.

MB noted that VSS Caseworkers will continue to proactively engage with vulnerable and marginalised individuals to facilitate engagement with services. This will be done via telephone or online video link. Individual Needs Consultations should only be undertaken where appropriate, to identify emerging needs and changing circumstances. It was noted that INCs, including all

supporting documentation, will be submitted to VSS via a dedicated email address.

It was noted that all clients will be advised not to send any invoices or receipts to the VSS office while staff work remotely. MB advised that the VSS payment processes will have to adapt and adjust to this difficult time and VSS will post more information on the interim payment processes as soon as possible. In the meantime, suppliers will be directed to email the VSS finance team, who will respond to all related queries.

### **Health and Wellbeing Frameworks – Flexibility and Changes**

MB provided an overview of changes to each service following the Covid-19 outbreak and noted some examples of what these changes might look like.

**Persistent Pain: Home Heating** - MB noted that a cash advance of £250 will be made to eligible individuals in April 2020. It was noted that individuals will be advised to keep receipts in a safe place and then submit to VSS once normal business resumes.

MB acknowledged the risks associated with this and advised that this is likely to be a changing and fluid situation and VSS will continue to monitor it carefully. MB noted that INCs will be accepted at this time for critical and immediate needs in the same way as usual.

### **Covid-19 Resource Guide – Victims Support Programme**

It was noted that the VSP Resource Guide was circulated to VSS funded organisations in response to COVID-19, to allow fast and timely action in local communities and to quickly adapt to changing and emerging needs.

### **VSP Covid-19 Flexibility Guidance**

MB advised the Board that in order to remove administration and bureaucracy, in addition to existing budget flexibility, the changes within the VSP guide will not require pre-approval. The guidance will be updated regularly based on learning and emerging needs throughout the coming weeks and months.

### **VSS Strategic Priorities during the COVID-19 period**

**Food and Essential Household Items:** It was noted that a monthly cap of £30 will be available per single household, and £50 if two or more individuals within a household. MB advised that exceptional cases will be considered.

**Mobile Phone/Device bills:** MB noted that a once off emergency top up/ contribution of £30 per person can be made in order to ensure vulnerable victims and survivors have the ability to stay in contact with friends and family.

**Electricity & Gas:** It was noted that a once off top up of £50 can be made during this period for vulnerable victims and survivors. MB advised that those who do not receive a VSS home heating grant will be prioritised.

**Lone Working:** It was noted that all staff delivering critical services should have basic equipment required to function, such as, a printer, laptop, mobile telephone, and health and safety equipment. MB advised that VSS will provide support to employees if required.

**School Equipment:** It was noted that this type of support will be considered carefully and in exceptional circumstances.

MB again noted that VSS' absolute priority over the coming weeks and months is the comfort and safety of victims and survivors, VSS staff and VSS community partners. It was noted that in times of uncertainty, many people will experience economic, financial and psychological hardship. VSS' priority will therefore be to continue to meet the needs of those most vulnerable, prioritising physiological needs, safety, security and social connections.

## **D 2019/20 Board Self-Assessment**

The Board assessed their effectiveness over the 2019/20 year.

The NAO Board Evaluation Questionnaire was presented on screen for members to discuss and to determine whether they strongly disagree, partly disagree, partly agree, or strongly agree with each statement within the questionnaire.

The outcomes of the Board Effectiveness process has been separately documented.

In light of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Board postponed a review of its performance objectives for 2019/20 until Summer 2020, when it will also set appropriate objectives for 2020/21.

**AP1 31.03.20** – Board to review structure and mix of skills of Health and Wellbeing Committee.

**AP2 31.03.20** – TL to draft Board 2019/20 self-assessment and circulate to Board members for agreement.

It was noted that the Board had also planned to use this session to review its current appraisal forms but with the current situation in respect of COVID 19, this has been deferred until Summer 2020.

**AP3 31.03.20** – Board appraisal session to be rescheduled. Date to be confirmed with Steve Mungavin.

**E AOB**

The Board finished the meeting by thanking all VSS staff for their continuous work and dedication during such challenging times.

**F Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 22 April at 10.00am via Zoom.