

Minutes of the Board Open Session meeting held on 22 January 2025 via VC

CHAIR

Rebecca Hilsenrath, Ombudsman

NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Polly Curtis, (Senior Non-Executive Member)

John Ainsworth

Anne Davies

Michael Parsons

Anu Singh

Amerdeep Somal

Sir Dave Thompson

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Gill Kilpatrick, Chief Executive Officer

IN ATTENDANCE

Maria Mansfeld, Chief of Staff

Scott Stevenson, Director of Strategy

Rowena Culshaw, Interim Chief Digital and Transformation Officer

Roz Pedersen, Assistant Director, Finance

Hazel Waddington, Assistant Director, Transformation

Andrew Dawson, Governance Officer (minutes)

APOLOGIES

Karl Banister, Director, Operations, Legal & Clinical

Faridah Newman, Governance Officer

1. Chair's Introduction and Welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.

1.2 The Chair noted apologies from Karl Banister and Faridah Newman.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 No interests relevant to matters on the agenda were declared.

3. Draft High-Level Business Plan and Budget 25/26**Business Plan**

- 3.1 The Board received a paper from the Assistant Director of Transformation outlining the draft high-level business plan for 2025/26.
- 3.2 The Ombudsman explained that the draft Business Plan would enable delivery of PHSO's Bridging Strategy for 2025/26, which had been discussed at the recent Executive Team and Board awayday, and which would be presented to the Board in March 2025 for approval.
- 3.3 The Board discussed the draft Business Plan, including:
- Members noted that the deliverables in respect of developing our people and culture are currently framed at a high level and are dependent on other business plan activities.
 - The Board discussed the separation between the Digital Programme and Casework Programme. These were closely linked, but remained separate programmes;
 - Members were concerned about management capacity, given planned levels of caseworker recruitment, and the organisation's capacity to manage and absorb change. The executive acknowledged the likely impact on managers and confirmed that they were looking at ways to support the recruitment programme.
 - One of the aims of the appointment of a digital delivery partner was to upskill PHSO staff to deliver the digital programme;
 - The Board noted the proposed level of caseworker recruitment and discussed how long casework staff stayed in the organisation after passing through the Academy.
- 3.4 Board comments will be taken into account in the final version of the Business Plan, to be presented for approval at the meeting on 19 March 2025.

Budget

- 3.5 The Board received a paper from the Assistant Director of Finance outlining the draft high-level budget for 2025/26. The paper also included a summary of the submission to HM Treasury for the second phase of the 2025 Spending Review, covering 2026/7 to 2028/29.
- 3.6 The Board discussed PHSO's planned investment in people during 2025/26, noting that the planned budget included a contingency for pay awards. Whilst pay negotiations had not yet commenced for 2025/26, the recent PCS ballot gave a sense of their likely approach for next year.

3.7 The Board discussed the sustainability of the financial position in the event of a reduction in funding in future, noting that the organisation did not consider this to be a significant risk.

3.8 The Board noted the draft budget for 2025/26, which will be presented to the Board for approval at the meeting on 19 March 2025.

4. Digital Business Case

4.1 The Board received a paper from the Chief Digital and Transformation Officer (CDTO), setting out the business case for the Digital Ombudsman project (Digital Business Case).

4.2 Members noted that the draft DBC incorporated feedback from the Board/Executive Team awayday on 7 January.

4.3 Members noted that the Digital Ombudsman project had not been submitted to HM Treasury on an invest-to-save basis. The focus of the project was to increase impact, improve accessibility and modernise the organisation.

4.4 However, PHSO remained committed to delivery of value for money. Measures and costs for each aspect of the project were being baselined, with the aim of identifying efficiencies at project and programme level.

4.5 The Board discussed concerns about the achievability of the proposed timescale to procure a delivery partner by April 2025, and how the relationship with the delivery partner would be managed.

4.6 Members noted that a procurement proposal had been referred to the Digital Ombudsman programme board and was being risk-assessed. The preferred procurement route could result in appointment of a delivery partner in around ten weeks.

4.7 **Action: The CDTO will provide an interim update to the Board on progress on the procurement of a delivery partner.**

4.8 Members noted that action had commenced to recruit a Commercial Manager, with appropriate skills and experience to manage the relationship with the delivery partner, and a Digital Programme Manager. The substantive CDTO will start in post on 24 March and a detailed handover from the interim CDTO was underway.

4.9 Members noted that the Digital Ombudsman project included the provision of dashboards or interfaces for Organisations we Investigate and other external stakeholders. This should be reflected in the DBC.

4.10 **Action: Amend Digital Business Case to include the provision of dashboards or interfaces for Organisations we Investigate and other external stakeholders.**

4.11 The Board **approved** the Digital Business Case.

5. Date and time of next meeting

- 5.1 The next Board meeting will be on 19 March 2025, 10:00 - 16:00, and will be in person at Citygate, Manchester.

6. Review of Meeting

- 6.1 Members commented that the meeting evidenced the points that had been discussed at the awayday in January. There had been a sense of shared endeavour and co-production. The meeting had been open. There had been appropriate challenge, but discussion had been polite and respectful.
- 6.2 Members commented that they had appreciated the opportunity to look in depth at the Digital Business Case.

The meeting ended at 12:25