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Minutes of Meetings of the Civil Service Accountability Board (CSAB) from 15th July 2015 to 21st July 2016

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Minutes of 1st Meeting of the Civil Service Accountability Board (CSAB)

Department of the Taoiseach, 15 July

[The membership and Terms of Reference of the CSAB are attached at Appendix 1]

Present

Taoiseach

Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform

Minister for Finance

Dorothy Scally

Bernie Gray

Paul Farrell

Shane Bissett

Martin Fraser

Robert Watt

Niall Cody

Seán O Foghlú

Apologies

Tánaiste

Item 1 – Introduction

The Taoiseach welcomed the Members of the Board and thanked them for their participation.

He outlined the purpose of the new Accountability Board within the overall context of the Government's Civil Service Renewal Plan. He gave some examples from his own experience of excellence performance by the Civil Service, but also stated there were areas where there was room for improvement. In his view, there was an appetite for change within the system.

He noted that a number of papers had been circulated to Members in advance, as follows:

- The Civil Service Renewal Plan (October 2014)
- Civil Service Renewal Plan First Progress Report (July 2015)
- Civil Service Renewal – Summary of Staff Engagement (October 2014)
- Civil Service Renewal – Background Data (October 2014)

- Report of the Independent Panel on Strengthening Accountability and Performance (June 2014)
- Minutes of the Civil Service Management Board from November 2014 to date
- The Public Service Reform Plan (January 2014)
- Papers setting out the latest position on each of agenda items 3, 4 And 5

The external members of the Board then made introductory remarks.

Item 2 – The Role of the Board and its Terms of Reference

The Taoiseach set out the Terms of Reference of the Board (see Appendix 1) and looked forward to it working in an open, effective and collegial manner. The discussions of the Board would be confidential, as appropriate, but would be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Following this inaugural meeting, the Taoiseach proposed that he would appoint Mr John Shaw of the Department of the Taoiseach as Secretary to the Board.

The Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform briefed the Board on the overall public service reform programme, including the independent Rafter Report on Civil Service Accountability, the Civil Service Renewal Plan and the importance of the Accountability Board in that context.

Mr Watt and Mr Fraser outlined the work underway to implement the Civil Service Renewal Plan and set out key challenges in areas such as cross-cutting issues, breaking down silos and proposed reforms to improve governance, performance management, leadership capacity and accountability for delivery. It was agreed that further detailed information would be provided to the external members.

The external members raised a number of issues for future discussion, or where further information would be useful, including:

- how the Accountability Board might measure performance and set its own key performance indicators (KPIs)
- data on the demographic composition of the Civil Service
- data on PMDS ratings distribution and coverage across Departments
- what an optimum structure and composition of the Civil Service might look like (eg age profile, gender balance, grade/banding)
- What the Vision for a World Class Civil Service means
- the question of whether there might be a skills gap and/or an engagement gap to be addressed
- the need to address talent management and recruitment/retention issues as well as underperformance
- how talent management operates in the private sector and possible lessons and challenges for the Civil Service
- how to unlock the huge potential, talent and creativity that resides within the Civil Service

- how to ensure that civil servant can see that their ideas are being listened to and taken on board
- the potential for developing greater external partnerships between the Civil Service and the private sector

It was agreed that further information on all of these issues would be provided to the external members at a separate briefing session before the next meeting of the CSAB.

Item 3 – New Performance Management System for Secretaries General

The CSAB noted a paper outlining the new system to be implemented from 2016 under the Civil Service Renewal Plan (Action No. 12 in the Civil Service Renewal Plan).

Among the points discussed were:

- the particular skillset needed to be an effective Secretary General, which is very broad and differs from other senior roles in both the Civil Service and the private sector
- the increased level of public scrutiny involved, and the importance of effective interaction with the elected Government
- the elements of the new performance management process, and the role of the CSAB
- the different aspects of the role of Secretary General, which goes beyond just ensuring the operational efficiency of the Department/Office to include, for example, being a public ambassador, judgement, political nous, communications
- the role of the Minister and the importance of the relationship between the Minister and the Secretary General in a Department/Office
- the possibility of developing training and improved supports for newly-appointed Ministers
- the importance of providing support for the Secretary and his/her own personal development

Mr O Foghlú explained the very significant changes that the new process would entail for the Civil Service, in particular the publication of performance information for Secretaries General.

Mr Cody set out the overall context for performance management for Secretaries General, which would involve existing frameworks for managing and reporting on Departments/Offices such as the Strategy Statements and Annual Reports, but would focus more on the leadership role of the Secretary General.

Item 4 – New Programme of Organisation Capability Reviews

The CSAB noted a paper on the new programme of Organisation Capability Reviews (Action No. 20 in the Civil Service Renewal Plan).

Mr Watt outlined the new programme, how it would be implemented and the proposed role of the CSAB as set out in its Terms of Reference.

A further update will be provided at future meetings as implementation commences.

Item 5 – Update on Proposed Whole of Government Pathfinder Projects

The CSAB noted a paper on the proposed Whole of Government pathfinder projects (Action No. 5 in the Civil Service Renewal Plan).

The chosen pilot projects approved by the Government are:

- National Strategy to Reduce Suicide
- Cyber-Security
- Public Services Card

Mr O Foghlú set out the work done to date on this aspect of the Renewal Plan, which is ongoing, while Mr Fraser briefed on existing mechanisms for cross-cutting work such as the Cabinet Committee system and senior officials groups.

Among the issues being examined are the experience in other countries, the barriers (including legal constraints) to cross-Departmental work and options to help remove or reduce them, the need to develop shared objectives that are long-term and can be implemented, the need to change the culture so that co-operation is deepened and doesn't require constant political oversight to be effective.

It was agreed that important cultural and behavioural changes were required and the CSAB would discuss these matters further when the Action Plan had been further developed.

Item 6 – AOB

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in the Autumn on a date to be agreed.

Appendix 1

Civil Service Accountability Board

Membership and Terms of Reference

Membership

- Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D. (Chair).
- Tánaiste, Joan Burton T.D.
- Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin T.D.
- Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan T.D.
- Paul Farrell, IBM Europe
- Bernie Gray, Better Boards
- Shane Bissett, The Royal Mint
- Dorothy Scally. Chair of The Top Level Appointments Committee
- Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, Martin Fraser
- Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Robert Watt
- Secretary General, Department of Education and Skills, Seán Ó Foghlú
- Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners, Niall Cody

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Accountability the Board are:-

- to have an overall governance role across the Civil Service and advise on and support the development of the capacity and capability of the Civil Service;
- to provide oversight and review of proposals for a new performance management system for Secretaries General and the effective implementation and operation of the system across the Civil Service;
- to provide oversight and review of the new programme of Organisational Capability Reviews including implementation of recommendations arising out of them; and
- to oversee Civil Service capability in implementing cross-cutting priorities set by Government or other system wide issues; this may involve considering individual case studies to promote learning and highlight best practice.

