



**The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom  
Management Board**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Attending: Mark Ormerod (Chair)  
Sam Clark  
Louise Di Mambro  
Paul Brigland  
Chris Maile  
Sanjeet Bhumber  
Janet Coull-Trisic  
Sophia Linehan Biggs  
Ian Sewell

Kathryn Cearns (Non-Executive Director)  
Tim Slater (Non-Executive Director)

**1. Apologies for absence.**

1.1 No apologies were received.

**2. Approval of the minutes of the meetings of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020.**

2.1 The minutes were approved subject to minor amendments.

**3. Actions and matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.**

3.1 Progress against each of the actions was considered and the Board noted the ongoing position of the actions.

**4. Declaration of conflicts of interests.**

4.1 No declarations of conflicts of interest were made.

**5. COVID-19 – Contingency Planning.**

5.1 The Board discussed the emerging position with the virus, all the aspects of contingency planning and the steps that had been taken. In particular the Board noted the following –

- All justices and staff were off site and working remotely. Only a very small skeleton staff (all contractors) remain on site for security and safety reasons. This was the final step in the plan which resulted in the Court building closing on Friday 20<sup>th</sup>

March, having prior to that only permitted entry to the building for those directly involved in a hearing.

- The priority for the rest of term remained the delivery of those cases listed and that was being achieved through the use of video conferencing technology (WebEx). The first hearing of that type took place on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and feedback on social and mainstream media had generally been positive.
- Work continued to secure and build laptops to enable all staff to work at home. Those who had yet to receive a laptop were working with their managers to agree tasks or training as necessary for their roles of personal development,
- The contribution from the IT team was commended by the Board noting their pivotal role in enabling justices and staff to work away from the building and the speed of which video conferencing options were identified and put in place.
- The focus over the coming weeks should be settling into the new ways of working and managers were reminded of the importance of keeping in touch with their teams regularly and not only engaging on work matters but also ensuring their health and wellbeing. The importance of sick absence monitoring was noted
- Processes and procedures had been put in place to ensure that key activities would continue to take place including filing case papers and Permissions to Appeal (PTAs); paying invoices; engaging - as necessary – with the media and responding to enquiries.

5.2 The Board recognised the huge efforts made by all staff to support the delivery of the Court's priorities at this difficult time and wished to extend its thanks.

## **6. Remuneration Committee update.**

6.1 The Board noted the oral update provided by the Chair of the Remuneration Committee.

## **7. Transformation Project - update.**

7.1 The Board noted the update and in particular the following areas –

- The Transformation Workshop on 20<sup>th</sup> February was very well attended and it generated many ideas and suggestions which would be considered as part of the Business Case or as areas of continuous improvement for the operations of the court.
- The Business Case continued to be developed and would consider the impact and lessons learned from the COVID-19 activities and planning, as recent events has meant that the operations had to move to operating in a more digital way very quickly.

## **8. Business Plan 2020-21.**

8.1 The Board considered the Draft Business Plan for 2020-21. The Plan was agreed and the Board noted the following –

- The Spending Review Settlement 2019 was for a single year so the Board agreed that an extension of the strategic priorities and objectives from the previous year would

allow for greater long term planning and activity as part of the Spending Review 20, which would be expected later in the year.

- The existing KPIs were agreed, subject to a clarification for the delivery of PTA timeliness and the financial position, but as part of the development of next year's Plan they should be more fully reviewed.
- The impact of COVID-19 and the Court's ability to operate and achieve all aspects of the Plan was discussed. Reference would be made to the impact in the Plan.

## **9. Staff Engagement.**

9.1 The Board noted the overview provided by the Head of HR on the progress made following last year's staff engagement survey. In particular the following points were noted –

- Four groups had been created, led by eight champions from across the whole court to investigate, develop proposals and implement improvement in these key areas. The areas are: Learning and Development; Management Capability, Team Work and Communications and Pay, Benefits and Feeling Valued.
- The level of staff engagement had already improved; all staff are involved in one or more of the groups and there had already been some improvements in communications across the Court.
- Whilst the key theme areas had been identified, it was important not to lose sight of the other areas of the survey as well.

## **10. Complaints Analysis.**

10.1 The Board noted report from the Director of Corporate Services on the analysis of complaints received by the Court in the last financial year. In particular the Board noted the following points –

- There had been an increase in the number of complaints received in 2019-20 (up to end February 2020), but there were no emerging themes which would indicate a specific cause. The profile of the court had increased over the last year but so too had the administration's focus on dealing with complaints consistently which may have resulted in an increased level of recording.
- The Court received 33 complaints (up to end February 2020) most of which were administrative complaints.
- By far the largest number of complaints received were not about the Court at all but as a result of events in the lower courts where individuals ask the Supreme Court to intervene on their behalf. In these instances, the individual is informed that the Court are unable to help them which could then lead to further correspondence.
- This would continue to be an area of focus in 2020-21.

## **11. Management Information Dashboard.**

11.1 The Board noted the contents of the dashboard and paper and in particular the following points were made –

- There had been a slight increase in the amount of virtual learning and engagement taking place as a result of the remote working arrangements. Attention would need to be given to ensuring this was all correctly recorded whilst working remotely.
- The position in relation to sick absence had improved since the last report and any areas of concern were being proactively managed.
- The number of FOIs received remained relatively static although the Board noted that guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office recognised the potential impact on access to information when most staff were remote working. It was agreed that this would be an area monitored but meeting deadlines would continue to be a priority wherever possible.
- The additional narrative supporting the case volumes and movements was welcomed.

## 12. Risk Register

12.1 The Board noted the risk register and cover paper. The following points were discussed –

- The most significant risks being managed by the UKSC continued to be Risk 2 (*Security and Safety*) and Risk 7 (*High Profile Failure*).
- As a result of recent events, the importance of IT and Broadcasting were recognised as key deliverables of the court's operations so should be considered and reflected in the risk register to ensure that vital services are maintained.
- COVID-19 was likely to have an impact on all risk and risk owners were asked to consider the mitigation in place and ensure it addressed the true risk.
- Risk 1 (*Finance*) was discussed and whilst it was recognised that the short term financial position had been resolved, the funding for the Transformation Project remained uncertain. The impact on the court's financial performance and ability to change would need to be considered in more detail.

## 13. Finance.

13.1 The Board considered the finance report and noted the following points –

- The resource budget was showing the projected forecasted underspend of £253k against the supplementary estimate budget (4%) at the end of February.
- The capital budget at the end of February continued to be forecasted as being fully utilised in the year.
- The allocation for 2020-21 is satisfactory and would show a balance budget at the start of the financial year.

## 14. Press and communications.

14.1 The Board noted the contents of the Press and Communications Update, in particular the following points –

- Media coverage in January and February had been steady with the swearing in of Lord Reed as President of the Supreme Court attracting some coverage, as well as hearing and judgments.
- It had been a busy ceremonial season with Lord Reed, Lord Hodge's and Lord Hamblen's swearing-ins and Lord Carnwath's valedictory.
- The UKSC welcomed 7,255 visitors in January and 7,045 visitors in February. This represents a 14.72% increase on the same period in 2019 (January 6082 and February 6383). Between January and February 2020, 67 school and college group tours were delivered – compared to 76 last year. There were nine cancellations of UK and international tours primarily owing to insufficient numbers, however two tours from China cancelled due to the Coronavirus.
- In January 2020, the UKSC website received 92,198 unique visitors. The website reached a peak 7,022 unique visitors on Monday 13 January 2020 for the swearing in ceremony of Lord Reed as President and Lord Hamblen as a Justice. In February 2020, the website received 98,649 unique visitors. It is also worth noting that the swearing-in of Lord Hodge as Deputy President attracted 7,464 unique visitors.
- The JCPC website received 9,774 unique visitors in January 2020 and 10,577 unique visitors in February 2020.
- Audiences across the Court's social media channels continue to grow steadily. We now have 264k followers on Twitter; 8,538 followers on Instagram; and more than 12k subscribers on YouTube.
- Production of the 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts was underway and on schedule.

## **15 Human Resources.**

15.1 The Board noted the update from HR and in particular the following points –

- The campaigns to recruit the new Chief Executive and Judicial Assistants for the September cohort was well underway. Closing dates would not be extended as a result of COVID-19.
- As reported at previous Board meetings, work to refine the court's approach to meet, as far as possible, the Smarter Working Initiative continued. The requirement for all staff to now work remotely has demonstrated our readiness for and ability to work remotely in line with the ethos of the Initiative.

## **16. Case Update.**

16.1 The Board noted the oral update from the Registrar.

## **17. IT Update**

17.1 The Board noted the contents of IT Update and in particular the following points not discussed earlier in the meeting in relation to COVID-19 planning –

- The forward look detailing the IT activities required over the next twelve months was considered by the Board and whilst it provided an overview, it was agreed that it did not outline sufficiently the requirements, the planning or the governance requested. A substantive standalone paper was to be provided at the May Board meeting.

UKSC  
April 2020