



LABOUR RELATIONS AGENCY

BUSINESS PLAN

2016-17

INTRODUCTION

This Business Plan sets out the work that the Labour Relations Agency (the Agency) will undertake during the 2016-17 financial year. The plan covers the third and final performance year of the Agency's Corporate Plan 2014-17.

The Agency Board held a planning workshop on 25 February 2016 to agree the strategic direction and operational priorities for the 2016-17 year; and also to identify the service delivery and public policy themes that should influence/inform the Agency's corporate planning process that the Board will take forward post the Assembly elections and agreement of the Executive's new Programme for Government.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Agency's mission is to improve employment relations, promote best employment practice and resolve workplace disputes through the delivery of quality, impartial and independent services.

The Agency's 2014-17 Corporate Plan establishes the following strategic aims:

- Promote better performance in organisations through improved employment relations and more effective dispute resolution;
- Inform public policy and debate on the economic and social value of good employment relations;
- Support the operation of fair, harmonious and effective workplaces;
- Optimise the contribution of Agency staff;
- Secure value for money.

2015-16 PERFORMANCE

The operating context over the 2015-16 year presented a range of challenges. The prevailing public expenditure constraints meant that the Agency was unable to fill on a permanent basis any substantive vacancies; even though this had a direct impact on operational capacity the Agency mitigated any business risks through the careful reallocation of available resources and the prudent use of temporary promotions to sustain the quality and scale of our frontline services. The late introduction of the Department for Employment & Learning (DEL's) Employment Bill; the upcoming Assembly elections; the planned restructuring of Government Departments; and the decision to establish a one year budget for 2016-17 all have created a level of uncertainty that has made medium/long term planning more problematic.

In response, the Agency redoubled its efforts to ensure that all key frontline service delivery targets were met and that our governance arrangements were further strengthened. To provide an understanding of the scale of the Agency's operations our helpline staff answered almost 21,000 calls and our conciliation team dealt with x

number of claims over the 2015-16 period. In terms of the Agency's overall performance the following was achieved:

- Delivered an extensive programme of good practice seminars/briefings and advisory workshops;
- Delivered responsive advisory services tailored to the needs of our customers;
- Delivered responsive and effective collective and individual conciliation services;
- Promoted and delivered the Agency's arbitration, independent appeals and mediation services;
- Refined the delivery model for Early Conciliation and consulted with a range of stakeholders;
- Facilitated multi-agency discussions on employment relations primarily through the Agency's support of the Northern Ireland Roundtable Forum on Employment Relations;
- Reached out to the main employer and employee representative bodies as part of our statutory commitment to promote good industrial/employment relations;
- Continued to work with a range of partner organisations in delivering our advisory and dispute resolution services;
- Embedded Phase 1 of the Agency's new case management system that now supports our help-line and dispute resolution services;
- Developed the specification for Phase 2 of our case management record system that will support all of our Advisory Services;
- Continued to invest in our people as evidenced by the Agency's achievement of liP Gold;
- Completed a number of important infrastructure projects to include ISO27001 accreditation and the development of our Intranet and new website;
- Continued to receive very positive endorsements about the quality and effectiveness of all of our front-line services; and
- Operated within our delegated expenditure limits with less than a x% underspend.

POLICY CONTEXT

Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK where employment law is devolved. Parity with the GB employment law system is now not the default position for our Executive/Assembly; the primary consideration is what is appropriate for the Northern Ireland economy and its labour market. This will continue to present unique challenges and opportunities for the Agency in delivering its statutory remit.

DEL's review of employment law has now been completed with the recent passage of the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. A key element of the new legislation is the establishment of an Early Conciliation service to be delivered by the Agency from May 2017. Under the new Early Conciliation service all potential tribunal claimants will be directed in the first instance to the Agency to explore whether their dispute can be resolved without the need for formal litigation. The legislation also includes a review mechanism requiring the sponsor Department, in consultation with the Agency, to review the effectiveness of the new service after one and three years of operation.

This will have a fundamental impact on how the Agency presents, delivers and evaluates its frontline services as well as having significant resource implications.

However, the Agency is committed to being operationally ready to meet the requirements of the new legislation working in partnership with our sponsor Department and key stakeholders. During the passage of the 2016 Employment Act the Department also indicated its intention to review the Agency's statutory Arbitration Scheme. Again, the Agency will want to play a very proactive role in this review to ensure that going forward the scheme is valued as a key element of the employment relations landscape.

The Assembly elections and the restructuring of central government departments have been very significant developments. Under the new arrangements the Agency is now sponsored by the Department for the Economy (DfE). The Agency Board views this as a very positive development providing the opportunity to present the Agency's role in its proper context as a key contributor to the wellbeing of the Northern Ireland economy. Following the Assembly elections the Executive will establish a new Programme for Government. This will be an important reference point for the Agency's Board as it starts the corporate planning process for the 2017-2020 period.

Finally, the public sector continues to roll out an ambitious programme of reform; the Agency is already providing support through a number of development projects and will seek to identify further opportunities to assist public sector organisations to positively respond to change.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2016-17

The Agency is widely recognised as the primary deliverer of employment relations services in Northern Ireland in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders and partner organisations. The Agency also has a statutory role to promote good employment relations. Pursuant to these objectives the main focus of this year's plan will be to:

- Develop a new employment relations model for Northern Ireland for consultation with all key stakeholders;
- Develop a more integrated/innovative approach to the delivery of corporate and frontline services;
- Continue to deliver the Agency's core services in line with our quality standards and customer expectations;
- Maintain and where appropriate increase uptake of the Agency services;
- Secure the required resources to deliver Early Conciliation;
- Put in place during 2016-17 the necessary organisational arrangements to be operationally ready to deliver an Early Conciliation service;
- Contribute to the evaluation of the Agency's statutory Arbitration Scheme;
- Grow our public sector work through the reshaping of the sector's industrial/employment relations environment;
- Develop a strategic approach for engaging with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs);
- Develop employment relations skills training for SMEs;
- Facilitate the work of the Roundtable Forum on Employment Relations;
- Establish a leadership and management programme for all levels of management within the Agency;
- Develop a new Human Resources (HR) Strategy;
- Develop a new Information Systems/Information Technology (IS/IT) Strategy;

- Take forward an accommodation review;
- Complete Phase 2 of the Agency's Case Management Record System project;
- Develop our social media capability and increase use of our online services;
- Deliver all business objectives within existing expenditure limits;
- Meet all governance requirements including implementation of internal/external audit recommendations and requirements of the new sponsor Department;
- Develop a new Corporate Plan on the basis of consultation with our sponsor Department and key stakeholders.

GOVERNANCE COMMITMENTS

The Agency's Board has established the strategic objectives and operational targets that are set out in this current Business Plan. The Agency's senior management provides the Agency Board with bi-monthly updates on performance against each of the operational targets. During the 2015-16 year the Senior Management Team redesigned the Business Plan performance report which received favourable commentary from our Internal Auditors.

Senior management also provide the Board with mid and end year assurance that the requirements of the Agency's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM), agreed with DEL as the sponsoring Department, are being addressed. The Agency meets with DEL on a quarterly basis to discuss accountability and policy issues. The Agency also has in place an Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) which provides advice and assurance to the Accounting Officer and the Board.

The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the ARAC, agrees Internal Audit's annual programme. The ARAC clears the terms of reference for all reviews. Internal Audit reviewed the Agency's governance arrangements in 2015-16 which provided a satisfactory level of assurance. The Agency has already initiated a project to implement all of the recommendations from that review. The Board has asked the Chief Executive to explore the value of using CIPFA's Governance Model in the current reporting period.

STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The strategic objectives requiring action during 2016-17 are set out below. They derive from the Corporate Plan 2014-17 and reflect the current debate on the further development of Northern Ireland employment law and employment relations.

Strategic Aim 1: Promote better performance in organisations through improved employment relations and more effective dispute resolution.

Strategic Objectives	Targets
1. The Agency is the preferred choice when individuals and organisations seek guidance on employment relations issues.	<p>Publish the annual events programme by 1 August 2016.</p> <p>Evaluate the current services to employers by 31 December 2016.</p> <p>Evaluate the current services to individuals by 31 December 2016.</p> <p>At least 10% of callers in 2016-17 will not have previously used the Helpline service.</p> <p>At least 25% of attendees at good practice seminars/briefings in 2016-17 will not have previously attended a seminar/briefing.</p>
2. Help prevent and resolve individual and collective workplace employment disputes relating to employment relations and employment rights.	<p>Put in place the necessary organisational and operational arrangements for the new Early Conciliation (EC) Service by 31 March 2017, to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment of additional staff by 1 September 2016;• Development of training plan by 30 September 2016;• Delivery of required training by 31 March 2017;• CMRS updates installed and tested by January 2017;• New operational guidelines in place by 31 March 2017;• Website and publications revised by 31 March 2017. <p>Support our sponsor Department (DfE) in the preparation of EC regulations by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Contribute to the DfE review of the Agency's statutory Arbitration Scheme by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>At least 50% of customers in 2016-17 to have reported that they have amended documentation/systems following Agency advisory assistance.</p>

3. Enhance the capacity of SME and Micro organisations to demonstrate good employment relations as a contribution to sustainable growth.

To work with the NI Employment Relations Roundtable to develop an Employment Relations (ER) Skills strategy for SMEs by 31 March 2017.

In partnership with lead SME representative bodies to pilot ER skills training for SMEs by 31 March 2017.

Publish 3 new case summaries promoting good employment relations practice by 31 December 2016.

4. Support public sector organisations as they address the major employment relations challenges deriving from the public sector reform agenda.

Facilitate the agreement of new ER working/engagement procedures within key areas of the public sector by 31 March 2017.

Develop and pilot ER training for public sector organisations by 31 March 2017.

Strategic Aim 2: Inform public policy and debate on the economic and social value of good employment relations.

Strategic Objectives	Targets
<p>5. Contribute to the development of public policy including the design and development of improvements to the system of employment relations for Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Respond to Government consultations where appropriate.</p> <p>Maintain an up to date employment law comparison table on a bi-monthly basis.</p> <p>Establish with the Employment Relations Roundtable Forum the strategic drivers that will strengthen Northern Ireland's employment relations system by 31 December 2016.</p>
<p>6. Build partnerships with key stakeholders to expand LRA's reach and influence in improving employment relations.</p>	<p>Review the nature and effectiveness of the Agency's operational arrangements with its primary delivery partners by 30 November 2016.</p> <p>Conduct a targeted programme of meetings with key stakeholders by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Facilitate the NI Employment Relations Roundtable in developing a shared vision and forward programme by 31 December 2016.</p>
<p>7. Act as a creative and innovative influence in the employment relations field</p>	<p>Develop a new Employment Relations model for Northern Ireland for consultation by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Develop an Employment Relations curriculum module for the Further Education Sector by 31 December 2016.</p> <p>Establish an internal working group to explore opportunities to develop a more integrated approach to the delivery of frontline services.</p>

Strategic Aim 3: Support the operation of fair, harmonious and effective workplaces.

Strategic Objectives	Targets
8. Alternative dispute resolution processes e.g. conciliation, mediation and arbitration are the norm for the third party resolution of all employment relations disputes.	<p>No more than 20% of individual rights claims referred directly to the Agency in the first instance to be subsequently dealt with by an employment tribunal.</p> <p>At least 60% of pre-claim referrals from the Agency's Helpline to agree to conciliation within 3 months.</p> <p>Promotion of a settlement in 70% of reported collective disputes in which the Agency is involved.</p> <p>Promotion of a settlement in 70% of mediation referrals to the Agency and where mediation takes place.</p> <p>At least 80% of Arbitrations/Independent Appeals hearings are undertaken within agreed timescales.</p>
9. Enhance the employment relations skills of managers and in particular first line owner managers/supervisors	<p>Review the learning outcomes of seminars and briefings delivered by the Agency by 31 October 2016.</p> <p>Publish an employment relations diagnostic tool by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>At least 75% of attendees report that they are now better equipped in dealing with employment matters in the workplace following attendance at in-house seminars/briefings.</p> <p>Publish, in partnership with the Equality Commission, two digital editions of employment and equality law updates for SMEs by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Deliver an employer-focused up-date roadshow in partnership with the Equality Commission in L'Derry and Craigavon.</p>

Strategic Aim 4: Optimise the contribution of Agency staff.

Strategic Objectives	Targets
<p>10. Develop Agency staff to ensure they are able to make the very best of their skills and abilities.</p>	<p>New HR strategy to be in place by 31 October 2016 and reviewed against 2017-20 Corporate Plan by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Complete procurement of new HR system by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Publish the 2016-17 Learning and Development plan by 30 September 2016; and</p> <p>Implement the plan by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Develop an Agency-wide Leadership and Management Development Programme by 30 November 2016.</p> <p>Succession Plan in place by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Staff survey issued by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Develop an action plan based on the findings of the 2016-17 staff survey by 31 December 2016; and implement agreed actions by 31 March 2017.</p>
<p>11. Comply with statutory obligations.</p>	<p>To submit the annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission by 31 August 2016.</p> <p>Annual monitoring return submitted to the Equality Commission by 30 June 2016.</p> <p>Article 55 Report completed by October 2016.</p> <p>Conflicts of Interest Policy for staff to be in place by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Updated Records Management Policy to be implemented by 31 July 2016.</p> <p>Retention and Disposal Schedule to be in place by 31 July 2016.</p> <p>Computerised HR records to be vetted for Data Protection compliance by 31 October 2016.</p> <p>Whistleblowing/Complaints/Fraud policies and Staff/Board Codes of Conduct to be reviewed by 31 March 2017.</p>

Strategic Aim 5: Secure value for money.

Strategic Objectives	Targets
12. Consistently look for efficiencies in all that we do without detriment to maintaining high standards of service delivery.	<p>Deliver all the Agency's strategic priorities within existing expenditure limits as determined by the sponsor Department by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Prepare and lay the Agency's 2015-16 accounts by 31 July 2016.</p> <p>Implement all internal and external audit recommendations by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Maintain compliance with all of the requirements set out in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Secure approval of the EC resourcing business case by 31 August 2016.</p> <p>Secure approval of capital business cases for Phase 2 of the CMRS and EC enhancements by 30 September 2016.</p>
13. Ensure that the Agency operates in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.	<p>Complete accommodation review, informed by LPS rent review, by 31 March 2017.</p> <p>Document energy usage action plan by 31 October 2016.</p>
14. Demonstrate the value for money of LRA services	<p>At least 1% of Helpline calls to be referred for pre-claim conciliation for 2016-17.</p> <p>The average Helpline waiting time to be less than 1 minute for 2016-17.</p> <p>The Helpline lost call rate to be less than 10% for 2016-17.</p> <p>At least 75% of advisory cases to be completed, for 2016-17, within 3 months of receipt.</p> <p>Secure approval of PPE for IS Managed Services by 30 June 2016.</p> <p>Complete PPE for CMRS Phase 1 by 31 August 2016.</p> <p>HQ Rent Review completed by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Value for Money review of paper records storage/ electronic retention completed by 30 September 2016.</p>

15. To operate the best and most appropriate channels of communication for clients to promote good employment relations.

Develop a new IS Strategy by 31 March 2017.

Secure re-accreditation against the ISO 27001 standard by 30 November 2016.

Assess feasibility of implementing ISO2231 Business Continuity Standard by 31 October 2016.

Draft EC change control requirements for CMRS by 31 May 2016.

Finalise specification for Phase 2 of CMRS by 30 June 2016.

Implement all EC enhancements to CMRS by 30 November 2016.

Implement Phase 2 of CMRS by 31 March 2017.

Develop new LRA digital applications (IOS, Android and Windows) by 30 June 2016.

Implement new document/records management server by 30 June 2016.

Agree new electronic and file sharing protocols by 30 September 2016.

Implement Regional Office/HQ network upgrade by 31 August 2016.