

**Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on Monday
15 October 2018 at 10.00am at the Labour Relations Agency, Gordon Street, Belfast**

Present: Albert Mills (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Jill Minne

In attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Don Leeson (Director of Corporate Services)
Morna Blaney (Acting HR Manager)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)

Apologies: None

Declarations of Interest: No conflicts of interest were declared.

This meeting had been rescheduled from September 2018.

The Chair welcomed Morna Blaney and Keelin Kelly who were attending their first meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

1. Minutes of the Last Meetings

1.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 23 April 2018 were agreed as accurate records (paper FP 01-10/18 refers).

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

2.1 All matters arising from the minutes of the last meetings were dealt with under the relevant substantive agenda item.

3. Finance Update

Management Accounts for the period ending 30 September 2018

3.1 The Director of Corporate Services tabled the Management Accounts for the period ending 30 September 2018 (paper FP 02 10/18 refers).

- 3.2 The Committee noted that there is currently a small underspend against profile (-3%), mainly because appointments following recruitment exercises were later than anticipated in the budget profile. The Senior Management Team will be consulted on priorities for using the underspend.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 3.3 The Committee noted that a decision would be needed shortly on whether the Agency should operate a Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) in 2018-19. Any unrequired funding should be returned as part of the October Monitoring Round, which is currently underway. It was agreed that a VES is unlikely to be needed.

Action: Chief Executive

Financial Outlook for 2019-20

- 3.4 The Chief Executive gave an update on the longer term financial outlook. The Agency does not yet know its budget for 2019-20, which constrains longer term planning, particularly decisions regarding further staff appointments.
- 3.5 The Committee noted that the Department of Finance has approved the business case for resources for Early Conciliation (EC). EC implementation requires commencement legislation and regulations, which is dependent legislation giving Departments the power to progress legislation in the absence of Ministers. This is likely to delay EC implementation into 2019-20.
- 3.6 The Committee noted that DfE has not yet formally confirmed the reduction in the Agency's budget made in 2016-17. However, this in effect means that the additional funding for EC implementation is offset by a cut of £100k.

4. HR Update

Organisational Transformation Update

- 4.1 The Chief Executive gave an update on the Transformation Programme, which is almost complete.
- 4.2 The Committee noted that the Chief Executive had conducted staff meetings to discuss the questions generated using the Mentimeter tool at the Staff Conference earlier in the year. This was also an opportunity to update staff on the Transformation Programme.
- 4.3 The new wider Senior Management Team is evolving well, with ERMs taking increased responsibility in decision-making processes and attending Board meetings to present on issues regarding their areas of responsibility.

- 4.4 The new Business Support Team has now been brought together in the same office, which facilitates better team working.
- 4.5 The Trade Union Side (TUS) will be consulted on a proposal to create an ERM post to progress work under Strategic Theme 2.

HR Plan for 2018-19 Progress Report

- 4.6 The Committee noted that Paul Lowe has been appointed as the HR Manager and will take up post towards the end of the year. In the meantime, Claire Kilpatrick and Morna Blaney are covering the post on temporary promotion as a job share.
- 4.7 The Acting HR Manager gave an update on progress in implementing the HR Plan. The main focus has been on developing a new Sick Absence Policy for the Agency, based on that of the NICS. This is expected to be agreed with the TUS at the next JNCC. In the meantime, the HR Team has met with NICS HR to discuss implementation issues.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 4.8 The HR Team is also developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy to support the new absence policy. This will have a particular focus on mental health and will be discussed with the Board Mental Health Champion at a meeting in November 2018.

HR Metrics for the period ending 30 September 2018

- 4.9 The HR Manager tabled a report on key HR metrics (paper FP 03-10/18 refers). A key issue has been the impact of the long term absences of a small number of staff. However, a number of the staff have now returned to work, which has meant that the overall absence figures have improved significantly.

Investors in People Update

- 4.10 The Committee noted that the Agency's assessment against the new Investors in People Standard is scheduled for November 2018.

5. ICT Update

ICT Plan for 2018-19 Progress Report

- 5.1 The IT Manager gave an update on progress in implementing the ICT Plan. The Agency will have new non-geographic (03300) telephone numbers from 22 October 2018, including a dedicated number for the Enquiry Point.

- 5.2 Live web chat is expected to be piloted shortly. The IT infrastructure to support this is in place and staff training takes place this week.

CMRS Phase 2 Project Update

- 5.3 The IT Manager gave an update on the CMRS Phase 2 Project. The new case management environment went live in September 2018, following user acceptance testing over the summer. The main conciliation enhancements are in use, with some minor snags to be fixed. The advisory services functions will be rolled out once staff training has been completed.
- 5.4 The new facility to allow bulk cases to be processed is now in operation.
- 5.5 The web portal, to allow the secure exchange of documents, is still under development. This is expected to be available in around four weeks.

Action: IT Manager

6. Communications Plan Progress Report

- 6.1 The Communications Manager gave an update on progress in implementing the Communications Plan, which was approved at the September 2018 Board meeting.
- 6.2 The new corporate branding will be unveiled at the annual public meeting on 25 October 2018. Guidelines on the use of the new branding and a style guide are being prepared. A distinctive font, Lato, is being adopted for use in all correspondence and documentation.
- 6.3 The Project Board, which is overseeing the development of the new website, meets on 16 October 2018 to agree the Project Initiation Document and specification for the website. It is envisaged that the website will be supported by two new Apps aimed at employees and employers respectively. The Chair of the Committee commented on how well the current App has been received, particularly by trade union representatives.
- 6.4 A number of staff will be visiting Translink on 16 October 2018 to look at how they manage their social media platforms to inform the Agency's approach.
- 6.5 The Chair of the Committee asked about promotion of the Joint Declaration by the Roundtable. It was noted that this would be a particular focus of speeches at the annual public meeting and the major employment relations conference being organised for 2019.

7. Accommodation Update

7.1 The Director of Corporate Services gave an update on work to identify longer term accommodation for the Regional Office when its current lease expires in June 2019. The option appraisal is being progressed and a business case is expected to be presented to the November 2018 Board meeting for approval.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

7.2 The Committee noted that a likely outcome might be relocation to interim accommodation in Richmond Chambers for 3/4 years, before moving into Orchard House, which is currently being refurbished. Both offices are on the government estate in Derry/Londonderry city centre.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 There was no other business.

9. Date of Next Meetings

9.1 The next Committee meetings will be on 4 December 2018 and 4 March 2019 (both starting at 10.00am).