

**Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on Tuesday
24 September 2019 at 10.30am at the Labour Relations Agency, Gordon Street, Belfast**

Present: Albert Mills (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Gary McMichael

In attendance: Tom Evans (Chief Executive)
Don Leeson (Director of Corporate Services)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)

The Chair welcomed Gary McMichael who has replaced Jill Minne on the Committee.

The Chair also welcomed Angela Bryans and Claire Kilpatrick, the Agency's new job sharing HR Managers, to their first meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Declarations of Interest: No conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 1.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 4 June 2019 (paper FP 01 09/19 refers) were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

- 2.1 The Committee noted that the Chief Executive had briefed the June 2019 Board meeting on mental health training undertaken by staff (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). This area continues to be a priority for learning and development, with more staff expected to be trained in Mental Health First Aid later in the year and suicide awareness training planned.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive reported that progress in forming an employee engagement group had slowed pending an understanding of the impact of the current industrial action by NIPSA (paragraph 4.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Discussions around a joint Management/TUS employment relations project with a focus on health and wellbeing are being progressed. In the meantime, the Committee noted that Gordon Parkes will address the Staff conference on 9 October on employee engagement.

- 2.3 The Committee noted that the TUS and Eddie Salmon have been invited to attend the September 2019 Board meeting to discuss employee engagement (paragraph 4.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.4 The Committee noted that the HR Plan for 2019-20 has been approved by the SMT and is now being implemented (paragraph 4.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.5 The Committee noted that the web portal was demonstrated at the June 2019 Board meeting as part of a wider presentation on Early Conciliation (paragraph 5.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Further enhancements to the portal have been commissioned and will be available for testing towards the end of October 2019.
- 2.6 The Director of Corporate Services reported that costings to provide the Agency's IS Managed Services have only recently been received from IT Assist, which has delayed the option appraisal (paragraph 5.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Further work is needed to understand technical issues associated with migrating CMRS to IT Assist's operating environment, and the costs of this, before the option appraisal can be finalised. It is anticipated that the option appraisal will be presented to the December 2019 Board meeting.
Action: Director of Corporate Services
- 2.7 The Committee noted that the IS Plan for 2019-20 has been approved by the SMT and is now being implemented (paragraph 5.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.8 It was noted that the EC Communications Plan for 2019-20 was approved at the August 2019 Board meeting and is now being implemented (paragraph 6.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.9 The Director of Corporate Services reported that the web developers have been invited to attend the September 2019 Board meeting to provide an update on the performance of the new website (paragraph 6.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.10 The Agency's new social media channels are now live (paragraph 6.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.11 The Committee noted that the Communications Plan for 2019-20 has been approved by the SMT and is now being implemented (paragraph 6.5 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.12 The Director of Corporate Services reported that a paper on Agency's work towards the Customer Service Excellence standard is due to be presented to the September 2019 Board meeting (paragraph 7.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).

2.13 The Business Plan Performance Report, including the OBA dashboards, was presented to the August 2019 Board meeting (paragraph 7.4 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). Feedback from Board and SMT members is being taken on how to refine the report to better integrate the dashboards, which will be done in time for the October 2019 Board meeting.

Action: Director of Corporate Services

3. Finance Update

3.1 The Director of Corporate Services reported that current expenditure is slightly below the resource budget profile and the Agency is on track to achieve its key financial target of spending 99% of its budget for 2019-20.

3.2 DfE has provided funding for additional staff to deal with an anticipated increase in demand for services following EU Exit and to commission research to inform the development of an employment relations model for NI. The outcome of bids for funding to cover the costs of additional employer pension contributions, an inward secondment, and the anticipated outcome of the Head Office Rent Review, is awaited.

3.3 The Committee noted the Agency's is participating in a financial bidding exercise for the three-year period to 2022-23. The Agency has highlighted the financial pressures it will face if its budget is 'flat-lined' throughout this period and it was noted that DfE is sympathetic to the impact such an approach has on bodies whose main costs are staff-related. The Director of Corporate Services reported that the main opportunities the Agency may have to ease its financial pressures are migrating IS Managed Services to IT Assist and relocation of Head Office onto the Government Estate, both of which are under active consideration.

4. HR Plan for 2019-20

4.1 The Committee noted the impact of the current industrial action being taken by NIPSA.

4.2 The Committee noted that a key focus for HR is EC readiness through recruitment of additional staff and training. Recruitment exercises for staff at ERO and EOII grades are underway. Staff with limited experience of conciliation were trained in this area by Acas; this learning is now being consolidated by shadowing experienced Conciliation Officers.

4.3 Acas are also being invited to provide training in collective conciliation. This training is expected to be in early November 2019 and will be open to Board members.

5. ICT Plan for 2019-20

5.1 The Committee noted that development of the web portal for Early Conciliation continues to be a key priority. Work on enhancements to the portal are due to start at the end of September 2019. Among other functionality, these enhancements will allow customers to request Non-ET1 conciliation through the portal.

5.2 It was also noted that laptops have been purchased for EROs to increase agile working and support the Agency's business continuity arrangements through increased resilience to the loss of the Head Office building through an event such as fire or flooding.

5.3 The Committee noted that there had been a data breach caused by post being delivered by Royal Mail to the Housing Executive. While this matter will be considered at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting, the Finance and Personnel Committee noted that the incident had resulted in the Agency no longer sending Tribunal case-related documentation to the Regional Office by post; instead, this is being scanned into a shared folder on the Agency's computer network, which is accessible by staff in both Head and Regional Office.

6. Communications Plan for 2019-20

6.1 The Communications Manager reported on a number of developments, including: the introduction of standardised email signatures bearing the new corporate branding; plans to develop new merchandising, including umbrellas; the development of eight videos to promote the Agency's services; plans to develop an e-newsletter; and the launch of the Agency's social media channels. The new videos are currently being subtitled and will be shared with Board members in due course.

Action: Communications Manager

6.2 In addition, Browsealoud has been added to the new website to increase its accessibility. The website's accessibility will be tested by a focus group of disabled people.

Action: Communications Manager

6.3 Awareness-raising of EC will be a priority for the next few months. The promotional campaign will start in earnest at the Agency's annual public meeting on 24 October 2019. A PowerPoint presentation on EC will be available in October for Board members to use within their networks.

Action: Communications Manager

7. Business Support Update

7.1 The Business Support Manager gave an update on the work of the Business Support Team.

7.2 A key current focus is progressing actions to ensure the Agency's services are compliant with the Customer Service Excellence standard. A presentation on this was put back from the August to the September 2019 Board meeting.

Action: Business Support Manager

7.3 The Director of Corporate Services reported that a paper regarding proposals for the longer term accommodation for the Agency's Head Office will be considered at the September 2019 Board meeting.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 There was no other business.

9. Date of Next Meetings

9.1 The next meeting will be on 3 December 2019, starting at 10.30am.

9.2 The subsequent meeting will be on 3 March 2020.