

Minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 6 September 2021 at 10.00am by videoconference

Present: Geraldine Alexander (Chair)
Michelle McGinley
Lee Wilson

In attendance: Don Leeson (Chief Executive)
Aideen Duggan (Board Apprentice)
Angela Bryans (HR Manager)
Claire Kilpatrick (HR Manager)
Paul Lowe (Director of Corporate Services)
Mary O'Brien (Business Support Manager)
Keelin Kelly (Communications Manager)
Patricia Coulter (Knowledge Manager)
Diane Edgington (Accommodation Project Manager)

Apologies: Alison Wolfe (Minute Secretary)
Paul Herink (IT Manager)

Declarations of Interest: no conflicts of interest were declared.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that this was the first meeting for Patricia Coulter, Knowledge Manager; Diane Edgington, Accommodation Project Manager; Keelin Kelly, Communications Manager and Boardroom Apprentice, Aideen Duggan.

The Chair congratulated Diane on her temporary promotion to the role of Accommodation Project Manager.

Board members introduced themselves.

1. Minutes of recent Meeting

1.1 The minutes of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 1 June 2021 (Paper FP01-09/21) were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

2.1 The Committee had previously agreed to invite Claire Webb, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion to this (September) meeting to discuss her role. With agreement this has now been scheduled for the December 2021 meeting (Para 2.1 of June 2021 Minutes refers).

Action: Director of Corporate Services

- 2.2 Options for the Agency's policy on Recognition and Reward are now reflected as 'embedding a culture of recognition' in the draft People Strategy which is a substantive agenda item for today's meeting (Para 2.2 of June 2021 Minutes refers).
- 2.3 The on-boarding hub for virtual staff inductions continues to be well received. HR are now considering ways of promoting the hub as a good practice approach (Para 2.5 of June 2021 Minutes refers).

Action: HR Managers

- 2.4 As a follow-up to the 'Work Well, Live Well' survey conducted by Chest, Heart and Stroke, the Senior Leadership Team have developed an action plan to address issues highlighted. A number of themes (including connection, health and wellbeing and job enrichment) are now reflected in the draft People Strategy which is a substantive agenda item for today's meeting. Issues around frustration with ICT systems are being progressed through this year's business plan objectives (Para 2.6 of June 2021 Minutes refers).
- 2.5 The Committee noted that plans for the employment relations conference in February 2022 are now well advanced. The Roundtable stakeholder group has also met to provide input on the arrangements (Para 2.11 of June 2021 Minutes refers).

3. Finance Matters – Update

- 3.1 The DCS reported an underspend of £268k against the budget profile at the end of July 2021, £161k of which was in employment costs. Based on year-end forecasts an easement of £150k has been identified in Economic Recovery Action Plan (ERAP) funding and this has been notified to the Department for the Economy through the October monitoring round.
- 3.2 The non-recurrent nature of the funding linked to ERAP and NI protocol activities has made it difficult to attract candidates to fixed-term/temporary posts. This is further exacerbated by an already stretched labour market.
- 3.3 The Committee noted the difficulties with regards to filling posts, especially the ability to only offer fixed term contracts. It was acknowledged that this had caused delays in recruiting, however almost all posts have now been filled.
- 3.4 The rates bill for the current year has now been received and paid by the Agency.
- 3.5 Management Accounts will be prepared for submission to the September 2021 Board meeting.

Action: Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

4. HR Matters

- 4.1 The HR Managers presented the Draft People Strategy 2021-25 (Paper FP 02-09/21).
- 4.2 The Chair thanked the HR Managers for the update and for their hard work in devising the Strategy.
- 4.3 The importance of an action plan to ensure delivery under each of the key themes and objectives was highlighted along with a process for monitoring progress. The HR Managers confirmed an annual work plan would be maintained and progress reported through SLT/SMT arrangements.
- 4.4 It was noted that feedback from Trade Union colleagues on the work of the HR team as presented through the recent Board meeting was very positive.
- 4.5 The Committee were content with the People Strategy and thanked the HR Managers for their hard work in pulling it together. The People Strategy will go to the September Board for approval.

Action: HR Managers

HR Metrics

- 4.6 The Committee noted the HR Metrics (paper FP 03-09/21).
- 4.7 The HR Managers identified a spike in staff absence in June 2021 due mainly to staff family bereavements and Covid 19 vaccine reactions. However a high percentage of staff still have 100% attendance.
- 4.8 HR are continuing to roll-out a range of Health and Wellbeing initiatives for staff.
- 4.9 Age analysis and length of service statistics show a high percentage of staff in the age profile of age 50 plus. This along with issues around diversity will be addressed within the new People Strategy.
- 4.10 The Agency has developed internal guidance around the 'right to disconnect' which has been well received by TU Side and Employment Relations Group colleagues. Michelle McGinley suggested that the right to disconnect guidance could be shared externally as a case study. HR Managers to discuss with the Advisory team.

Action: HR Managers

HR Matters

4.11 Policy development work is continuing. Most recently, the Disciplinary and Grievance Policy has now been ratified through the JNCC.

4.12 The completion of annual staff performance appraisals was noted.

4.13 It was also noted that the Agency has been shortlisted as a finalist as part of the annual CIPD NI Awards. The winner will be announced on 7 October.

5. Communications Matters

5.1 The Communications Manager presented the Draft Communications Strategy 2021-25 (Paper FP 05-09/21).

5.2 The Committee noted the Communications Strategy as being impressive, ambitious and vitally important in enabling the Agency to deliver on its future vision and raise its public profile. It was commended as an excellent piece of work which will now go to the Board for final ratification.

5.3 A query was raised by Lee Wilson as to when the Agency last refreshed its branding. The Communications Manager confirmed that the existing branding was developed in 2018 and undertook to recirculate the use of branding and style guidelines to ensure they are used consistently by staff.

Action: Communications Manager

5.4 Michele McGinley commented on the Agency's plans regarding podcasts and encouraged the involvement of Board members in promoting the Agency.

5.5 The Communications Strategy will go to the September Board for approval.

Action: Communications Manager

6. Business Support Matters

6.1 The Business Support Manager presented the Draft Business Intelligence (Data) Strategy 2021-25 (Paper FP 06-09/21).

6.2 The Chair thanked the Business Support Manager for the update and for the hard work involved in developing the Strategy.

6.3 Lee Wilson commented on role of the Agency as a provider of official statistics provider and highlighted the importance of close liaison with the Communications Manager in effectively using and integrating data within the Agency's communications. The Committee were advised that the primary

purpose of the Business Intelligence Strategy was to incrementally develop greater use of the Agency's data to inform business and service development. Initial mechanisms are already in place to better inform the material issued through social media channels.

- 6.4 The Business Intelligence (Data) Strategy will be presented to the October Board for approval.

Action: Business Support Manager

Update on Accommodation Matters

- 6.5 The Chief Executive advised that plans for a return to the Agency's office premises will be developed in light of NI Executive Guidance, which is expected imminently.
- 6.6 Preparations have commenced for the exit from Gordon Street premises, including work to be completed on existing paper files and logistics for the physical relocation.
- 6.7 The Agency will consider potential use of regional hubs as part of future office accommodation arrangements as per NICS plans.
- 6.8 The development of Hybrid Working Guidance is at an advanced stage with a view to publishing it imminently.
- 6.9 The Accommodation Project Manager confirmed a risk assessment has been drafted in respect of plans to reopen Gordon Street premises for staff. This could potentially happen in October dependent on NI Executive guidance. Staff numbers onsite will be managed by way of a digital rota.
- 6.10 The James House Project team is currently considering office furniture and colour schemes following the collation of staff comments and feedback on James House furniture plans and layout.
- 6.11 A review of the Agency's business continuity plan will be undertaken in light of changing accommodation and working arrangements.

Action: Accommodation Project Manager

7. ICT Matters

- 7.1 The Director of Corporate Services presented the Draft IS (Digital) Strategy 2021-25 (Paper FP 04-09/21) and updated the Committee in relation to progress in completing CMRS Phases 3/4 development work and plans for the future delivery of IS Managed Services.

7.2 The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services for the update and confirmed the Committee was content with the draft IS Strategy.

7.3 The IS (Digital) Strategy will be presented to the October Board for approval.

Action: IT Manager

8. Any Other Business

8.1 The Director of Corporate Services requested the Committee feedback best wishes to Kevin McCabe on behalf of the management and staff of the Agency.

8.2 The Chair thanked everyone for their excellent work and contributions, and particularly for the development of the four very important corporate strategies which were presented today.

9 Dates of Next Meetings

9.1 The next meetings will be on 7 December 2021 at 10.00am and 1 March 2022 at 10.00am.